THE INDIAN STAGE

Vol. III

GIRISH CENTENARY EDITION

By

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Deshbandhu C. R. Das,
Girish Chandra,
Girish Protiva
&c.

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Dedicated

to

The famous litterateur

Late Devendra Nath Bose

Cousin of the Great Damatist

Girish Chandra Ghose

Who first suggested to me the idea of writing

a regular History of the Bengali Stage.

Author

FOREWORD

Stage, at one time in Bengal, was a very useful institution for mass-education and for inspiring the people with noble and lofty ideals, though it now seems to have lost its former glory. Records of the achievements of the great pioneers in this who had devoted their lives for the furtherance of its cause constitute a vital chapter in our national history. That the subject is of general interest is evidenced by the fact that the famous Standard Literature Co., has undertaken to push the sale of the History of the Indian Stage.

For the publication and compilation of these volumes however, if I am to express my sincere, grateful thanks to any person, it is to Mr. Sachchidananda Bhattacharjee, one of the famous business-magnets of the present time. Most people know Mr. Bhattacherjee only as a business-man, but those who had the privilege of coming in close touch with him know what a rich and philanthropic heart he possesses. Endowed with a keen philosophical bent of mind and an acutely logical intellect, he is devoting his valuable time in devising means and measures from *Shastras* for uplifting the economic and moral condition not only of his countrymen, but also of the whole world. But for the invaluable help of this remarkable man, none of my books since 1933 would have seen the light of the day. May he live long to the delight and great benefit of his countrymen!

Next, I am duty-bound to express my gratefulness to some gentlemen of position for their encouragement and ungrudging help. Of them, I should first mention the name of the famous journalist Mr. W. C. Wordsworth, late Director, Public Instruction, Bengal, who took the trouble of

procuring for me some old files of the *Statesman* from its Delhi office. Such goodness and courtesy are quite rare. I ought to thank Mr. R. G. Stephen, Managing Director, and Mr. A. N. Banerjee, Manager of the Standard Literature Co. for urging me to proceed with my work. Next my thanks are due to Mr. Nalini Ranjan Sarkar, a worthy son of India who always takes a lively interest in my literary works.

For the "Marathi Theatre", I am deeply indebted to Mr. V. B. Chitale, who has taken great pains to collect all facts for me especially from Marathi *Natyakala* and *Natya Wangmoy*. My thanks also are due to Dr. S. P. Agarkar, M.A., Ph. D., for the interest he has taken in this history.

My research work has been pursued mostly at the Imperial Library since 1918, when Dr. Van Manen, who has kindly written a masterly introduction to my first volume, was the librarian and I am thankful for the interest that the library authorities always take in my works.

But for the co-operation, help and assistance given to me by my esteemed colleagues Messrs. A. B. Chatterjee, M.A., F.R.E.S., and S. N. Sen, B.COM., this book could hardly be published.

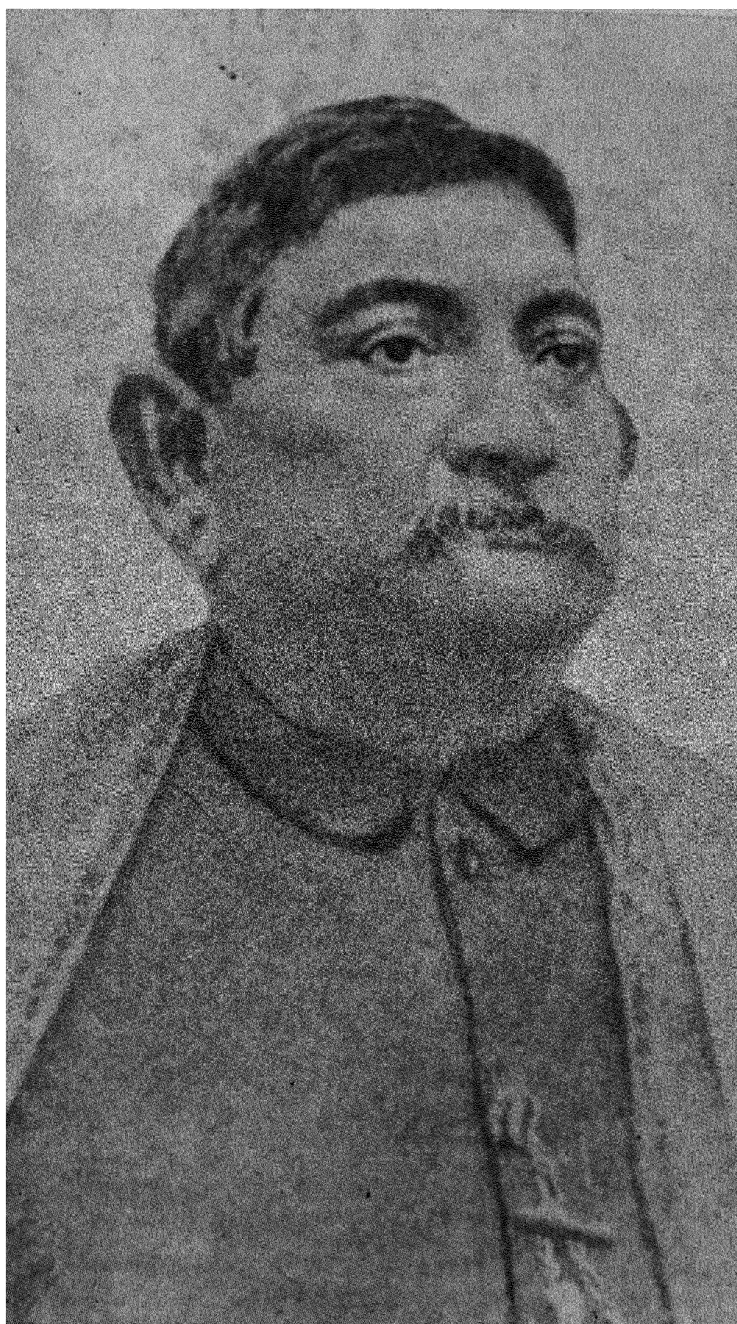
I am grateful to the authorities and staff of the Metropolitan Printing & Publishing House, Ltd., especially to Mr. K. V. Appa Row, B.A., B.L., who is also helping me for the Madrasi Theatre.

Hemendra Nath Das Gupta.

124/5B, Russa Road,
Calcutta,
The 31st January, 1944.

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INDIAN STAGE

Vol. III

OR

Girish Chandra—The Man and the Moment

CHAPTER I

NATIONAL THEATRE (1877-1883)

In the preceding volume of the Indian Stage, we have dealt with the Dramatic Performances Act passed in 1876, which still now stands unrepealed in the Statute Book, menacing like Damocle's sword that might at any moment fall upon the head of its intended victim. It not only produced at the time a good deal of panic among all who were closely connected with the Stage but it threatened to prove to be the very grave of the Bengali Theatre. At this critical moment came forward, however, a man who by his rare genius, wonderful power of organisation, coupled with giant's energy for work saved

not only the Bengali Drama from a premature grave, but transformed also the Theatre to the highest pinnacle of dramatic perfection. One can not fail to be struck with deep feelings of admiration and wonder, when he thinks of the limitations and restraints under which the great revivor had to work, how greatly handicapped he was at every step in achieving his great purpose, how incessently he suffered from men, money and materials for effecting his work and how yet at the end by his ceaseless 'tapasya' he triumphed over all difficulties, transformed the Play-House from a mere rendezvous of pleasure into a respectable institution for moral and cultural education of the people and raised the Bengali Drama from its early crude stage to the highest plane of dramatic art! The monumental achievement of this great man who is not only recognized as the greatest dramatist of Bengal but also one of the greatest dramatists of the world, we propose to deal with, in this volume.

Science has not yet succeeded in accounting for the birth of a genius. Why a Plato or Sankara, a Kalidasa or Shakespeare, a Bankim Chandra or Chittaranjan, is born at a particular time and in particular circumstances and what are the determining factors of a genius, Science is unable to give any answer. Yet Nature has its course and the right man comes at the right moment. So did Girish

come forward with his genius at the time of the sorest need of the country.

It has been said of Shakespeare, "He was not a lordly poet who stooped to the stage and dramatised his song, he was bred in the tiring room and on the boards ; he was an actor before he was a dramatist." We shall show how these lines apply in all force to Girish as well.

Now to resume the thread of our narration from the preceding second volume—

After the Surendra Binodini prosecution in 1876, which was soon followed by the Act, the National Theatre practically became defunct. Babu Upendra Nath Das, the director and dramatist left for England, all available dramas were exhausted, yet no dramatist was forthcoming; and above all, the financial condition of the proprietor, Babu Bhuban Mohan Neogi, grew daily from bad to worse. Mrs. Sukumari Dutt, the famous actress of the National Theatre left the stage, for the time being, as her husband too followed Upen Babu. Binodini left for the Bengal Theatre; and Babu Nagendra Nath Banerji had also to give up theatre for the marriage of his daughters. Babu Ardhendu Shekhar Mustafi with a travelling troupe wandered over different parts of Bengal, showing performances here and there. Babu Amrita Lal Bose, failing to accompany Upen Babu to England, left for Port Blair. Indeed

we donot hear of any performance shown by the Great National Theatre for a considerable length of time till Dec. 2, 1876, when with a good deal of apology for its past irregularities, it opened with a short opera called 'Pārijāt Haran' from the pen of Atul Krishna Mitra. This was followed by 'Adarsha Satee' of the same author and an absolutely worthless opera by Radha Madhab Haldar, which drew forth Girish's ridicule, in a poem representing the disappointed spectators of the Gallery:

'What a deceptiou have you practised on me, give me back my eight anna* bit'.

Unable to run the Theatre in its tottering state, Bhuban Mohan leased out the house to one Krishnadhan Mukherji, but its sale was so poor that the lessee fell into arrears of rent, for which he had to be sued. This ebbed the life of the Great National Theatre. At this critical juncture, as if by Divine dispensation, came forward Girish, who with his eagle eye, at once found out the week spot of the Bengali Theatre. He found that a theatre with an extravagant proprietor, to whom the theatre was more a hobby of pleasure than occupation, could never be regularly run, and the higher purposes of the stage could not be achieved through him. A permanent regular theatre was needed for the country. Girish was thus in search of a business-

* Each gallery ticket was sold at annas eight.

like man to be the lessee of the theatre and it took him some time. In the mean time, Girish with the help of one Kedar Choudhury, a man of some literary taste, possessing a small zemindary at Ghateswarā (24 Pergs.) took the lease of the theatre in the name of his brother-in-law Dwaraka Nath Dev and reopened the "National Theatre", with Kedar Nath as its Director, though, of course, Girish was the life and soul of re-started theatre.

A Rally of Good Artists.

Girish then collected round him all the good artists he could lay his hand upon. Binodini had already returned from the Bengal Theatre and henceforth became his dearest pupil. Babu Amrita Lal Mitra, son of a neighbour of Girish—Gopal Babu, was seen performing an amateur Jātrā and Girish struk by his sonorous voice and good figure persuaded him to join theatre and the latter became henceforth the most favourite disciple of Girish. These are the two main artists whom Girish used to select in his dramas, generally as a hero and a heroine. Babu Ramraton Sanyal, the well-known opera-master whose talents were amply displayed in "Sati-ki-Kalonkini", the three noted Lals—Mohendra Lal Bose, Motilal Soor and Amrita Lal Mukherjee (Bel Babu), the famous actress Kshetromoni Devi and the leading lady Kadambini—all came under his banner. The troupe was thus complete.

For the first time now Girish composed a dramatic piece—"Āgamoni" (lit. the advent or the beginning) and staged it on Oct. 6, 1877. Āgamoni means the coming of Mother Durga during the autumn and the drama of its name too, proved hereafter as the fore-runner of Girish's dramatic compositions. It was dedicated to Kedar Choudhury as affectionate brother and was followed by "Akāl-Bodhon" the offering of worship at the untimely season. Sanyal's songs in both these pieces enchanted every body.

There was practically no drama left at the time and "Meghnadbadh" the immortal epic of the celebrated poet Michael Madhusudan Dutt came to the rescue. It was not a drama but was rendered into a drama by Girish and was staged on Dec. 1, 1877.

A few words about the technique is worth-mentioning. Sometime before Girish took up the piece, "The Bengal Theatre" too about which reference has been made in the second volume, was staging "Meghnadbadh, where practically the part assigned to Rama was left out. Another defect which mortified Girish very much was the prose-style of the actors in rendering the parts. Girish Chandra therefore on the first night of performance of the play, after the curtain was drawn, read a poem composed for the occasion wherein he made an open attack on the incorrect reading of Michael's poetry practised in

the Bengal Theatre. The recitation of blank verse by the artists here was as perfect as possible. We shall next see how he made further improvement in the verse in the dialogues.

In this play Girish was in the dual roles of Meghnad and Rama. It is very difficult indeed for man to portray the two divergent charactors in the same play but the proud and heroic character of the hero Meghnad in full contrast to the meekness of Rama was fully demonstrated in true colours by Girish in so masterly a way that it became the talk of the day every where.

"Meghnadbadh" though immortal as a great epic, labours under this particular drawback that the character of the great national hero has been greatly lowered from the original ideal. Rama has been made weak and irresolute, rather effiminate to a degree, but Girish's rendering of the part demonstrated a great improvement on the conception of Madhusudan himself. When Nrimundamalini, Promila's Sakhi or companion, challenges Rama to a dual, Girish as Rama makes a spirited reply—

"Janam Rāmer Ramā
Raghurāj kule Bireśwar !"

and when Bibhishana comes in a hurry and tells him—

"Oh Lord, please come out and witness Promila's

prowess, this band of heroines is formidable like Chāmunda, the enemy of the Raktabijas,"

Rama as if in jest smiles a little and answers Bibhisana thus—

Dūter ākriti dekhi darinu hridaye
Rakshobara juddhāsadh tejinu tokhoni

"O best of the Rakshas, I was so alarmed even by the sight of the emissary, that I gave up then and there all my desire for battle".

Such exquisite was Girish's histrionic art! But, says Girish Chandra, "Ram's character has been, on several occasions so distorted from the original high ideal, by Michael, that it is difficult with any wit of an artist, however powerful, to reconcile it."

The part of the above "Nrimundamālini" was played by Khetromoni Devi who was evenly matched with Rama, and was a worthy attendant of Promila—the heroine—represented by Binodini who in this and seven other parts acted by her, did full credit to herself.

The other parts were distributed as follows—

Lakşman	...	**Kedar Nath Chowdhury**
Rāvana	...	**Amritalal Mitra.**
Bibhişana and Mahādev		**Matilal Sur.**
Sugrīb, Marīch, Saraṇ	...	**Atul Chandra Mitra (Bedaul).**
Hanumān	...	**Jadunath Bhattacharjee.**
Indra	...	**Ashutosh Banerjee.**
Kārtic and Dūt	...	**Amritalal Mukherjee (Bel Babu)**

Madan	...	Ramtaron Sanyal.
Mandodarī	...	Kadambini.
Chitrāṅgadā and Māyā	...	Laksimoni Dasi.
Śachī	...	Basanta Kumari.
Bāsantī	...	Kusum Kumari (Khoṅra.)
Promilā	...	Binodini.
Nṛmuṇḍamālinī	...	Khetromoni.

As we said before, Girish was at his best here. As in Neemchand he proved himself to be the best serio-comic actor, in Bheem Singh and Pasupati as the greatest tragic actor, so in the representation of the contradictory dual roles of Rama and Meghanād, he was justly recognised as one of the greatest actors of the world.

It is said and Babu Akshoy Chandra Sarkar was heard to repeat that on one occasion when Girish as Rama bade adieu to Lakshman, the audience, specially the ladies were so much struck with grief that they forgot their position, removed the pardah (now no more) and began to gaze upon the two brothers only to be roused to the sense of their situation when that scene was shifted. For the information of our readers we quote below from the great litterateur, Akshoy Chandra Sarkar's *Sādhāraṇī* where Babu Indra Nath Banerjee (another famous writer) thus wrote about the performance on a later occasion :

"We have not enjoyed for a long time the treat we had on the 2nd February last when we saw a

performance of *Meghnādbadh.* The dual roles Rama and Meghnad were taken by Girish Chandra Ghosh, the head of the party. One man in representing two opposite characters would usually look unnatural, but Girish Chandra by his dramatic genius and extraordinary powers made us forget that defect, and at the rendering of Rama's part our eyes were now and again drenched with tears. When Lakshman entered the place of worship, we were enchanted at the dignified appearance worthy of Meghnad but immediately when Meghnad pulled up himself with eyes flaming with anger and expanded his chest to meet Laksman in a duel, then Girish exhibited his highest histrionic skill. It was wonderful to a degree. We were, in fact, greatly amazed at that. We have read of Garrick, the famous actor of England in books, but we can not conceive that any Garrick can show greater skill than Girish of Bengal. Let Girish live long and win his fame by contributing to our joy. Girish is an ornament of Bengal.*

Following *Meghnādbadh*, Girish next rendered Nabin Chandra's *Battle of Plassey* into drama in the same month. Here, too, Girish's part as Clive was superb and movements of his body quite befitting the hero of Plassey. *Battle of Plassey* had however nothing of a drama in it. There is no situation nor have characters been developed. It is only

* "*Sādhāraṇī*" 10th Feb, 1878.

those whose recitation for the particular part is captivaiting, can carry the day. But of Girish thus does the contemporary paper write :

"The actors are all good readers—Clive's recitation and the delivery were the best. He is also expert in timely postures and movements." (*Sādhārañī* January 21, 1878).

Thus, though National Theatre began to earn reputation, Girish Chandra at the earnest request of his brother, Atul Krishna Ghose, who apprehended that like other lessees, they too will be ruined by the theatre, surrendered the lease in favour of Babu Kedar Chaudhury. Since then Girish all along managed and conducted theatres, but himself never had any connection as a proprietor.

In addition to the previous performances Girish also rendered Dinobondhu's story *Jamāloye Jībanta Mānuṣ* into an interesting farce.

In January 26, 1878, an opera *Ānanda Milan* (Happy Re-union) was played for the benifit of Babu Abinash Kar (Mr. Rogue) but it did not play well. Girish's next opera—*Dolelila* (significance of Holi) on the 4th March also met the same fate.

Babu Bankim Chandra Chatterjee was then in the meridian of his glory and he was, in fact, the literary dictator of his time ; hence, as could be naturally expected, the Bengali Stage

also came under his powerful literary sway, and this period of the Bengali theatre may justly be termed as "Bankim Era" as we have formerly seen that of Madhusudon and Dinabandhu.

Girish now rendered *Biṣabṛkha* (the poison-tree) into a drama and had it staged on the 27th April, 1878, with a powerful cast which was as follows :

Nagendranath	...	Girish Chandra.
Devendranath	...	Ramtaran Sanyal.
Śrīś	...	Mohendra Bose.
Sūrjyamukhi	...	Kadambini.
Kunda	...	Binodini.
Kamalmoni	...	Kamala.
Hīrā	...	Narayani.

Biṣabṛkha was very successful and Girish represented fully the various feelings in Nagendranath. Kunda, too, was excellent as also all the parts. "Bengal Theatre" did not also sit idle but took up the newly published book of Bankim—*Chandraśekhar* and Biharilal, Haridas, Sarat Chandra, Bonobiharini and Elokeshi respectively appeared in the roles of Chandrasekhar, Protap, Lawrence Foster, Dalani and Kulshom. It was not successful, but as they were very popular with 'Durgesnandini' where Sarat Chandra, expert in riding, appeared as Jagat Shingha on horse back, Girish was advised to render this novel into a drama and beat down the Bengal Theatre. He got it up and put on boards on the

22nd June, 1878 but Kedar Babu and Kiron Babu appearing in the rôles of Jagat Singha and Osman could not stand competition with Sarat Ghose and Haridas Das of the Bengal. Girish then himself took up the rôle of Jagat Singha and put Mohendra Bose in that of Oshman. In everything except as a rider on horse back on the stage, he stood successfully against the rival party. The audience, however, were disappointed not to see him on horse back. Girish, too, admitted the superior demeanour of a prince in Sarat Babu, hailing, as he did, fromthe wealthy and aristocratic family of Bengal. Binodini's Aeyesha was also superb, and the other parts were as follows :—

Katalu Khan	...	Mati Sur.
Bidyadiggaj	...	Bedoul Atul.
Rahim Sheikh	...	Bel Babu.
Bimala	...	Kadambini.
Ashmani	...	Laksmimoni.

Owing however to an accident, his feet having slipped on the stage on the rest of Khichuri left by Bidyadiggaj, Girish had a fracture in his left elbow which kept him confined for three months. Thus the National Theatre of Babu Kedar Nath Choudhury was broken up.

We shall give here an instance as to the method of Girish Chandra's coaching the artists from the account given by Srimotee Binodini Dasi :—

"Girish Chandra used to give me instruction

with much care and affection. His method of teaching was quite novel. First, he used to give the significance of the particular part, then we were asked to commit it to memory ; after that at leisure he would train me up as time passed on. Babu Amritalal Mitra and Amritalal Bose, too, used to come to our house and used to tell me about the writings of Shakespeare, Milton, Byron, Pope and stories about the celebrated actresses of the various English schools.

"Sometimes Girish Babu used to explain passages from different English dramas and poems and gave me lessons about the movements of the body and different postures. On account of such careful training I began to apply myself to histrionic culture What I had learnt bofore was like a parrot, but hence-forth I could comprehend the part easily. I became anxious to see the acting of every English actress that came to Calcutta and Girish Babu encouraged me in that. On my return he used to ask "how did you see" ? I used to tell him everything that I felt and he gave the proper significance where I could not follow."

In 1879, Gopeechand Sethi took lease of the National Theatre and Babu Abinash Chandra Kar became its Manager. On the opening night (1st. January) an opera *Kāminī Kunja* by Gopal Chandra Mukerjee was played, where Ramtaron Babu and Binodini appeared respectively in the roles of

Krishna and Radhika. Another notable incident was the presence of Sir Richard Garth, Chief Justice, Bengal, on the 26th May 1879, at the National Theatre where an opera *Nandan Kusum* was staged as a benefit night for the education of destitute native children. It dealt with the episode of *Aja* and *Indumati* and was from the pen of Babu Monoranjan Das, son of the late Babu Kali Mohan Das, and cousin to late Mr. C. R. Das (Deshabandhu).

Hem Babu's *Vṛitasaṁhār* was also staged on the 19th April, 1879 for one or two nights.

Plays on Wednesdays & Sundays Introduced

Babu Abinash Kar was an energetic manāger and introduced a change on the stage. When the theatre was opened, performances used to be held on Saturday alone and gradually play on Wednesday was also introduced, since on Saturdays office-Babus used to leave for their native places, as daily-passenger system was not in vogue then. Next for a trial on one occasion Abinash Babu advertised the play on a Sunday at 2 P.M. and the attendence was large. Since then performances used to be held thrice a week including Sundays, but the time 2 P.M. was āfterwards changed to candle-light.

National Theatre at Dacca

In the month of August, finding no crowded houses in Calcutta, the National Theatrical Com-

pany under Abinash Babu reached Dacca and began to show some performances on the East Bengal stage (Purba Banga Rangabhumi). Some leading gentlemen of the place with puritanic ideas began a campaign dissuading the school boys from seeing the performances connected with public women. This is to be noted that on previous occasions when Calcutta theatre came, there was no female artist with them. On the 7th August, 1879, a meeting was held in the premises of the theatre with Mr. Pope, Principal, Dacca College as Chairman. Mr. Livingstone, Dr. P. K. Ray and the great literateur Kaliprosnna Ghose dissuaded the people from seeing plays especially at that time of famine. The Headmasters also issued notices prohibiting boys from seeing the performances by women on pain of expulsion from the school. Khaja Abdul Gani, the Nawab of Dacca, however patronised the theatre and other gentlemen of lead and light, prominent amongst them being Mohini Mohon Das, also evinced great sympathy.

The following amateurs went to Dacca—Babus Amritalal Bose, Amritalal Mukerjee (Bel Babu), Matilal Soor, Mohendra Lal Bose, Amrita Lal Mitter, Atul Krishna Mitter, Ramtaron Sanyal, Kashinath Chatterjee, Nilmadhob Chakraborty and Jogendra Nath Mitter.

After this the troupe went to Burdwan and then to Bankipore on the occasion of the investi-

ture ceremony of Maharaja Lakshmiswar Sing Bahadur of Darbhanga. A number of Rajas and Maharajas were invited from different places and Sir Stewart Bailey, the then Lieutenant-Gevornor of Bengal, presided over the function. *Meghnādbadh* was played before so august an assembly on the occasion. The company was further compelled to stay a month and a half more at Bankipore for giving other performcnces and Rai Bahadur Durgagati Banerjee, personal Assistant to the Commissioner of the Patna Division rendered them all necessary help. The Company was next invited at Bettia and there it showed some performances.

Towards the beginning of 1880, the Company left for Beneras, Allahabad and Lucknow and after that they reached Calcutta. Gopichand Sethi having discontinued the lease of the building, Babu Kalidas Mitter (Babu Kedar Nath Choudhury's maternal uncle) became the lessee, but the theatre was again stopped within ten months. The theatre now changed a number of hands, last of whom was Babu Jogendra Nath Mitra, who with a view to increase the number of spectators introduced for the first time the system of making presents to them in the shape of rings, ear-rings, looking glasses soaps, handkerchiefs, perfumes etc. The spectators in the pits and galleries were thereby increased and when Jogendra Babu went to the climax by giving fruits and vegetables, the theatre came to an end.

As the rent of the land whereon the theatre stood and the Municipal taxes fell in arrears, Babu Bhubon Mohon Neogi the proprietor was sued and in execution of a decree the Great National Theatre was sold at an auction sale for Rs. 25,000/- to Babu Protap Jahuri, a Marwari gentleman of extensive business with shrewd business instincts, peculiar to men of his class. Jahuri (literally a jeweller) wanted to conduct the theatre on strictly business lines. On taking possession of the theatre the first thing he did was to approach Grish Babu with a view to enlist his valuable co-operation as the manager of the theatre.

Now, came the right and opportune hour. Grish was pleased to find out at last a man he exactly wanted and when Protap Jahuri approached him, Girish promised all help, as he had hitherto done, as an amateur, but Jahuri was importunate and wanted his whole-time services with a promise to pay Rs. 100/- a month, insisting that no man could serve two masters. Girish at this time was a trusted officer of Messrs. Parker & Co. and was getting a salary of Rs. 150/-a month with prospects of future emolument. The situation was a trying one—on the one hand a permanent service with a better future in an English firm—on the other, the possibility of the establishment of a permanent Bengali theatre which would be a very useful and nation-building institution for the country

and its people. Drama and stage were in their ebbing point ; and there was no chance of getting a new dramatist ; rehearsals would have to be conducted, moral tone of the actors to be improved, stage to be supervised, for all of which full energy and whole time devotion were essentially necessary. Girish thought that co-operation with this rich businessman was the only way, by which he could realise the long cherished object of his heart. At last the call of Ranganath, the master deity of Dramatic Performance became paramount and he left the service. He gave up the certain for the uncertain and no persuasion of his office master, Mr. Parker, who loved him dearly could prevail on him. He threw himself head and heart into the great and daring venture.

After accepting Jahuri's offer, Girish began to rally round him his old associates, Mohendra Bose, Amrita Mitra, Binodini, Khetromoni, Ramtaron Sanyal, and last not the least Dharamdas Sur,—the architect of the stage under whose directions scenes and costumes were arranged. The assembly of all these talents made the "National" once more a thing of great attraction to the public.

Protap's Theatre opened on the 1st January 1881, with *Hāmīr* a historical piece from the pen of the deceased poet Surendra Nath Mazumdar, the author of *Mahilā Kābya*. *Hāmīr* is the story of the Rajput prince of Mewar, who liberated Chitore from Mobarok Khiliji after it had been laid seige to

by the Khiliji King Alauddin Khiliji, and Padmini and a number of Rajput ladies had burnt themselves on pyres. Girish wrote to the poet's brother Devendra Babu, asking permission to stage it, which however was given. Girish recast the piece and composed all the songs which Devendra Babu acknowledged with thanks when the drama was published some time in March 1881. There is a very long song in the drama put in the mouth of the *Bhāt* (known as the song of Padmini) which Girish shortened to an original composition and put it in the mouth of Mr. Sanyal playing in the role of Cāraṇ while passing on the streets, and path. This was a national song with a soul-stirring appeal :

"Listen, O, the residents of Chitore
The sorrowful tale of Padminī,
Sung by the wind.
The light of the Sun discloses
The blood that runs in stream destroying
the enemies,
Arise, awake, O, the brave and the wise
Take your leave,
The time for action has come."

Girish Chandra appeared in the title role of the hero, Mohendra Bose in Udaybhat, Amrita Mitra in Kākājī and Binodini in Lila, the widowed daughter of Maldeva, governor of Chitore from Delhi.

The play continued for three nights only ; but as the National Theatre for the last four or five years was looked upon with disfavour for its irregularity, it failed to draw any crowds and thus went down in competition with the "Bengal Theatre."

The turning point of the National theatre was, however, the small but charming opera of *Māyātaru* by Girish Chandra, which was staged on January 22, 1881 as an after piece of *Battle of Plassey*. It caught the imagination of the audience and its songs* were very much appreciated. Ramtaron Sanyal as Surat and Bonobiharini as Fulhashi were equally pleasing with their songs and "Binodini in the light role of Fulhashi," as Shambhoo Chandra Mukherjee editor of Reis and Rayat wrote, "was simply charming". People began to like operas, but yet there was no large crowd.

The next opera was Girish Chandra's *Mohinī Pratimā*, where the picture has been taken from an English opera *Pigmalion* and *Galatea* by Sir W. S. Gilbert, then played at Calcutta (1880) by an English Opera Company, and the part of the heroine Galatia was taken by Miss Fanny Enson, a lady with considerable powers of expressing pathos. The play relates, how a sculptor was so absorbed with his model that the doll he made was actualy

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*Both Bankim Chandra and Babu Rajnarain Bose highly praised the songs composed by Girish.

awakend into life. Girish took Binodini to one of the performances where Miss Fanny used practicaly to bring down the whole house in the climax scenes. Girish's *Mohinī Praṭimā*, too, was enjoyable with the following cast :

Hemanta	...	Ramtaron (Pigmalion)
Nīhār	...	Bonobiharini.
Shāhānā	...	Binodini (Galatia)
Mohendra	...	Mohendra Bose
Kusum	...	Kadombini.

The next piece was *Āladin* played along with *Mohinī Praṭimā* on the 16th April 1881 where the story was taken from Arabian Nights Aladin (Sanyal) hanging the tuft on the back like a Chinaman, Girish (Kuhaki) muttering incantations with magic wand and, turning eyes on both sides and Khetromoni as Aladin's mother did wonderfully well.

These pieces, operas as they were, with ephemeral interest did not satisfy Girish's imagination and he was simply looking for a drama. But where was the drama ? All the novels were exhausted and Mr. R. C. Dutta's *Mādhabī Kaṅkaṇ* also was tried two weeks before, Girish having taken seven distinct parts there.

After all a drama came out and it was from Girish's pen. This was *Ānanda Raho* staged on the 21st May 1881, but was not received well. It gives some idea of conflict between Akbar and Rana Protap and hints at Akbar having subse-

quently poisoned the cup for Mansingh who was invited to the palace as a guest. There were some shades of Lady Macbeth in the character of Lahana too, and a novel character *Ānando Raho* played by Girish himself was introduced. All the same the drama proved a failure. People could not forget the sensation Bengal Theatre produced with *Aśrumaṭi Nāṭak* on its boards about the same facts, a few months ago, nor could they understand the significance of *Beṭāl.** The first drama of Girish met thus a hopeless fate and *Bhārati* a monthly journal edited by Babu Dwijendra Nath Tagore represented the popular view "we did not expect such an anarchy in imagination in Girish Babu."

Disappointed, Girish set this thoughts to Pouranik (mythological) dramas and the first of its kind was *Rāvonbadh*, the story forming the fight between Rāvana and Rāma. It however met with unprecedented success and the following remarks of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, the 4th August 1881 would be worth-noticing—

"There was a grand performance of National

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* Betal (Ānando Raho) & Ākbar—Girish Chandra, Pratāp Sing—Amrita Mitra, Mānsingh—Amrita Bose, Shelim—Bel Babu, Nārāyan Singh—Mohendra Bose, Mahisī—Elokeshi, Lahonā—Binodini, Jamuṇā—Kadumbini, Bhāmsha—Mati sur.

Theatre last Saturday and we congratulate the management on the signal success achieved on the occasion. A New drama *Rāvonbadh* destruction of Rāvana – written in verse by the "Garrick of the Hindu Stage" and the new and splendid sceneries and dresses, to say nothing of the histrionic talents of the actors and actresses, called for the repeated and enthusiastic applause. We hope all lovers of Hindu drama, will muster strong on the next occasion."

All felt diffident at first as to how the mythological piece would appeal to the public but they were disillusioned. From July 30, 1881, *Rāvonbadh** continued with unabated enthusiasm of the audience in the midst of which *Sītārbonobāsh* or Exile of Sita was put on boards on the 17th Sept., which attained much greater success with the following cast—

Rāmā	...	G. C.
Lakṣman	...	M. Bose
Bharat	...	Bel babu
Vaśiṣtha	...	N. M. C.
Valmiki	...	Amrita Mitter

* Rām – Girish Chandra, Lakṣman—Mohendra Bose, Rāvan—Amrita Mitra, Bibhīṣon—Amrita Bose, Indra—Bel babu, Hanumān—Aghore Pathok, Brahmā—Nilmadhob Chakrvarty, Sugrīb—Upendra Mitra, Trijatā, Nikaṣā & Kālī—Khetromoni, Mondadari—Kadambini, Saramā—Narayani, Sita—Binodini.

Durmukh	...	**A. L. Bose**
Sumontra	...	**Atul kumar Mitra**
Sītā	...	**Kadombini**
Urmilla	...	**Bhuson kumari**
Allakshorā	...	**Bhuni**
Laba	...	**Binodini**
Kuś	...	**Kusam (khonrā)**

The theme of *Sitār Bonabāsh* representing as it did the Hindu ideal of womanhood and chastity has always been a favourite theme with the Hindus. *Rāvonbadh* too echoed the same sentiments while Sita entered into the flames after the war was won. The success of the both may amply be illustrated by the fact that the female seats which hitherto remained practically vacant began to be fully crowded with the two plays thus bringing a great change in the history of the Bengali Stage. The song of Laba & Kusa "*Gāo Vinā Gāore*—Sing Thou Vina, Sing" used to fill the audience with such interest and pathos that each night the house used to be packed to suffocation.

The national sentiments were roused and now theatre got its drama and people also got the stage of their heart. The mythological dramas of the 'National' became thus the talk of the day and from now on the Bengal Theatre failed to run on in competition with the National. Indeed for years till the social, historical and religious dramas came to be played, *Sītār Banabāsh* formed a great attraction for

all theatres—Star, Emerald, City, Minerva, Classic and the Unique Theatre. The well-known papers *Sādhāraṇī, Bhāratī, Amrita Bazar Patrika, Somprokās* etc were full of praise of these dramas and *Bhāratī* which complained of the dearth of imagination a few weeks ago, now wrote (1288, Magh and Falgun) : "Girish's kalpana is Shphatika-stambha"—a prism where sun's rays being reflected testify to transparentness and the magnitude of the sun.

In *Sītār Banabāsh* there is something novel in conception too. In the last scene after Sita was brought to Ajodhya from Valmiki's hermitage and was asked to submit to the further test of her chastity by entering into the flames, the only reply that came from her was—

"Nāhi diba parīkṣā anal "

"No, no more to the fire, but the Dharitrī (mother) will take me to her womb, and O my lord, I shall meet you in the next world."

The idea was as dignified as the scene touching, and pathos formed the chief interest in the performance from start to finish.

SītārBanabās was followed by *Abhimonyo Badh* (how the young son of Arjuna and Subhadrā—a young boy was surrounded by seven stalwart charioteers) staged on Nov. 26, *Lakṣmaṇ Barjan*

on Dec. 31, *Sītār Bibāha* on March 11, 1882, *Rāmer Banabāsh* on April 15, *Sītā Haraṇ* on July 22, and *Pāṇdaber Ajñātabāsh* (the last of Girish's dramas in 'National') on Feb. 3, 1883. For the inquisitive readers we should give here a brief description of each—

Abhimonyo Badh

The story is awful as the fight was most unequal and unjust and the dramatic art was fully in keeping up with it. The opening scene exhibits a grim picture when the piśāchas (demons) sing "Rakta kḥābo sharā sharā" (shall drink blood in saucers) and scenes from the beginning of the meeting till the end of the third act remind us too of the witches of Macbeth, thus maintaining the idea of the drama fully. The cast was as follows—

Judhiṣthra and Duryadhone	...	Girish Chandra
Droṇ	...	Kedar Chowdhury
Jayodratha	...	Mohendra Bose
Rohinī	...	Kadambini.
Bhīm and Garga	...	Amritalal Mitra.
Karṇa	...	Aghore Pathok
Abhimonyo	...	Bel Babu
Śṛkṛiṣṇa	...	Kedar Choudhury
Arjuna	...	Mohendra Bose
Uttarā	...	Benodini
Subhadrā	...	Gangamoni
Gaṇak	...	Aghore Pathok
Duśāshon	...	Nilmadhob Chakra

Lakshman Barjana

The next piece was *Lakṣman Barjana* (exile) 'an one Act drama', but which never failed to draw tears from all eyes. Girish as Rāma, Mohendra Babu as Lakṣman, Upendra Babu as Kālpuruṣ and Amrita Bose as Durbāṣā were splendid while Lava and Kuśa represented by Binodini and Kusum used to send a thrill of tragedy in to the hearts of those present with their song "Kāndo vinā kāndo —weep thou my lyre" which was much appreciated. The lessee of the theatre specially wished one to be inserted as in *Sītār Vanabās.*

In *Rāmer Vanabāsh*, the part of Monthora as represented by the powerful actress Khetromoni was so successful that it called forth constant roars of "Dur dur, exit" from the audience.

Sitāharaṇ, too, was equally successful and the last not the least was *Pāndober Ajñatabās* where the parts of Kichak and Duryadhone were as exquisitely done as those of Bṛhannala by Mohendra Bose, Bhim, Viṣma and Brāhmin by Amrita Mitra, Droupadi by Binodini and Hārini by Khetromoni Devi. This was the last piece of Girish in "National Theatre." A few other pieces—*Bhotmaṅgal, Brajabihār, Malīnmālā* that preceded *Pāndober Ajñatabās* need no detailed mention.

Now the account of the past two years of Protap

Jahuri's theatre is in fact the history of the first beginnings of the Permanent Theatre in Bengal. Unlike the former proprietors, most of whom turned to insolvents. Jahuri conducted the theatre on a business line and with him as an example Girish proved how a theatre could really be a source of profitable income. But the principal thing needed for it was a regular supply of dramas. Madhusudon's dramas had already been put on boards, his epic poem and those of Nabin and Hem were rendered into dramas, Bankim's novels were already dramatised, and every body felt the want of dramas, without which audience could not be satisfied. Advertisements for dramas were issued but there was no response. At last, out of sheer necessity Girish had to take up the pen himself! Genius got its scope and within a short time of two years, no less than ten beautiful dramas were produced.

These pieces touched the hearts of the people and they flocked to the theatre in large numbers. Theatre now became a thing of general attraction, and gratification of the public knew no bounds. How from the first, these dramas met with unprecedented success we get fully from the autobiographical account of Binodini. Thus she writes—

> "Since *Rāvanbadh* was staged, the theatre-hall could not accommodate the audience, even the seats in boxes and dress-circle were filled up.

> Even men of wealth and culture who did not witness a performance in Bengalii theatre out of derision, began how to purchase tickets for the upper seats one or two days before the performance."

It is for the constant supply of dramas which satisfied fully the national demands, and the new turn Girish gave to the theatre, touching sentiments and tastes of the people of the country he has justly been called the "Father of the Bengali Stage." We are sure that his achievements fully justify the title of honour, as otherwise we do not know what would have been the fate of the Bengali Stage and of the Bengali Drama, if Girish did not come at that time of the sorest need of the nation. Let us quote a few lines from the pen of the dramatist and manager Aparesh Chandra Mukherjee from his "Stage—Thirty years" which thus follow—

> "For the worship of the goddess of dramatic art, drama is the first and foremost material. Drama is the life of the theatre. It is its only food of sustenance. So long our theatres depended on others' charity, until the last alms were used up. But Girish came forward and brought the jar of nectar. It is only Girish who can be justly called the "Father of the Indian Stage". There is no uncle or cousin of it.

We have already referred to the first mythological plays of Girish. One might naturally ask why

Girish turned to mythology instead of to history? Apart from other reasons, he was drawn to mythology by the force of circumstances. The country was not prepared to get into history nor for the reception of ideas of nationalism. The historical drama *Ānanda Raho* did not meet with success, although we get the first germ of the famous characters of later times, such as Bātul (Sribatsha), Ākal (Asoke) and of Karim Chāchā (Serajaddula) and similar others. Girish thus turned to mythology for his dramas and met with amazing success. No doubt criticism poured in from different quarters finding fault with such ancient topics, but Girish's defence was "that all high class books of each nation have been based upon mythology. Homer, Virgil, Milton and Michael produced their best pieces on mythology. Hem Chandra's *Bṛtrāsṃhār* is borrowed from it and the best three novels of Bankim Chandra are based on the most popular religious piece—the *Bhāgbat Gītā*. No poet's conception can surpass that of Vyāsa or Vālmiki nor has any poet or dramatist or historian been able to depict a more sublime ideal than of Rāma or Kṛṣṇa, Lakṣman or Viṣma, Sitā or Subhadrā." Girish thus produced no less than 72 dramas within thirty years from *Rāvaṇ Badh* to *Tapobal* (1912) and never will *Chaitanya Līlā* or *Bilwamangal*, *Janā* or *Pāṇdaba Gourava*, *Sankarācārya* or *Topobal* ever grow stale, Indeed never could a dramatist of any part

of the world nationalise *Purāna* or mythology, as the great linguist Dr. Harinath De remarked, like the Bengali dramatist Girish Chandra.

There was also another main reason of success and that was the new technique in dramatic conversation. For years poetry was the passion of the people and prose was at a discount. Iswar Chandra Gupta's influence continued unabated and even Dinobondhu, Bankim, Rangalal and Monmohon claimed to be his pupils. Madhusudon's majestic blank verse found its brilliant successors in Hem Chandra and Nabin no doubt, but Gupta's style still worked. In fact, poetry of which Iswar Gupta was the leader, domineered over the Bengali literature till Bankim Chandra's great novels drew educated people gradually to the field of prose. Girish's dramas were thus written more in poetry, but a new verse was found indispensable in mythological dramas. The old verse in use was out of date and from experience it was found that Madhusudon's verse, too majestic as it was, was not suitable for the stage and Girish thought that it would be an imposition both upon the actors and upon the audience at large to use Madhusudon's blank verse. Thus Girish had to invent a new form of blank verse less scholastic than that of Madhusudon but far more appropriate for drama, more suitable for acting and more lucid and melodious than the scholastic blank verse. This new type of verse is Girish's own creation and came

to be known as "Gairishi Chhanda". It is said that Girish got the hint from a few lines printed on the front page of Kaliprashnna Sinha's *Hutome Panchā's Naksā.* From its introduction by Girish other dramatists also began to follow in his footsteps and this newly invented verse of Girish contributed not a little to the subsequent development of the Bengali dramas and the growth and popularity of the Bengali Stage.

As to how the verse was appreciated at the time, Babu Dwijendra Nath Tagore, editor *Bhāratī* and the eldest brother of Rabindranath, thus wrote in his paper—

> "We are very much in favour of the new type of blank verse as introducted by Girish Chandra. Indeed this is the real blank verse. Both the freedom of the verse and its sweetness have been maintained. What is required is the verse of the heart, not that is according to the dictates of Shastras. We tried it and we are happy that Girish Chandra has helped us in it."
> —*Bhāratī*, Magh, 1288.

Girish too wrote to poet Nabin Sen "Verse is necessary in drama—but what verse? In my verse the language soars from easy to the high, step by step." Late Akshoy Sircar of *Sādhāraṇī* fame, also said "After all the language of the drama has been found out".

The next thing to be marked was the slow but

steady departure from the play of jātrā spirit to true dramatic spirit and to the technique of the theatre. Girish did not lose sight of the fact that jātrā performance was very much popular with common people. His *Āgamanī, Akāl Bodhan, Dol Līlā, Rāsh Līlā*, etc. read less like dramas but more like plays fit for Jātrā performance except that scenes are not seen in the latter. But from *Rāvanbadh* Girish gave such a twist to the existing form of Bengali dramas that the difference became at once perceptible. All the same, such scenes *e.g.* conversation between Hanumān and Trijatā were also introduced as to provide for popular entertainment as was derived from jātrās, yet preserving intrinsic characteristics of a drama in tact. The next piece "*Sītārbanabās,* however, is a perfect drama in its truest sense and the song of Lava and Kusha "Gāo viṇā, Gāore" is a song of a very elevated nature which neither in grandeur nor in pathos, nor in art, a jātrā piece could ever approach. This gradual transformation from jātrā pieces to developed dramas is an important factor to be noted in Girish's growth as a dramatist.

It was with these dramas and scenic reforms newly introduced, that the stage became a thing of extraordinary attraction for the people. The scenes with Sītār Agniparīkṣā in *Rāvanbadh*, and illusion respecting assemblage—more than 2000 people—in *Sītārbanabās* when Sītā went to the vast hollow-

ness,—and the like, were the first steps to the scenic improvement Girish proposed to have arranged. Girish saw that he could do these and much more with Protap Jahuri. But the latter with all his business-tact could not however forego the stingy habits of a scheming profiteer and he turned a deaf ear to Girish's recommendations for artists, and the policy he began to pursue had nothing of broadness. For a few days of the absence of Binodini, the star-actress, from the stage, for example, he did not hesitate to deduct her salary. Tension of feelings was very much perceptible, and Girish left the 'National Theatre' and with him also followed his staunchest adherants—Amrita Mitra, Amrita Bose, Nilmadhab Chakravorty, Probodh Ghosh, Upendra Mitra, Aghore Pathok, Kadambini, Khetromoni, Binodini and etc.

Those that remained were Moti Sur, Mohendra Bose, Bhuni, Chhotarani, Jivon Sen, Bel Babu, Radhamadhab Kar, Dharmadas Sur and others with Babu Kedar Choudhury as their leader. Bel Babu however left the "National" soon after, and joined Girish. Thus arose two parties and Girish naturally felt a great bias for his adherants and gave them all patronage. This was one of the reasons why Babu Amrita Mitra having always got proper scope and preceptor's backing, rose to the top, was the master of the premier theatre—the 'Star', lived in affluence and died at the height of his influence, where-as

Mohendra Bose no less a powerful actor, with all his histrionic talents and reputation as a great tragedian, was ever in wants and difficulties, and died rather a disappointed man.

After Girish left, Babu Kedar Choudhury became the manager and two dramas only need mention here, during his incumbency. The first was the performance of Bankim Chandra's master-piece—*Ānanda Math* dramtised by Kedar Babu and the parts of Jivananda, Satyananda, Mohendra, Santi and Mahapurush respectively taken by Kedar Choudhury, Moti Sur, Mohendra Bose, Bonobihiri (Bhuni) and Ardhendu Sekhar Mustafi. The play was not at all successful and none was satisfied. It was performed on the 7th May 1883 and the well-known weakly *Sādhāranī* wrote about it.

> "None has been satisfied with the performance of *Ānanda Math*. Not even a sparkle of patriotic fire was enkindled in our hearts. Not a drop of tear came out of our eyes".

It is needless to say that Bankim Chandra must have been very much dissatisfied with the imperfect representation. So he expressed to many.

Swapnamoyī a minor piece need no mention here and the theatre came to an end with Kedarnath's *Chhatrabhanga*.

Girish Babu had not however to sit long and up came the "Star in" the horizon. Let us follow the rise and course of it in the next chapter.

Chapter II

Star Theatre (at Beadon Street)

The origin of the Star Theatre reads almost like a romance. Babu Gurumukh Roy, a rich young man belonging to the Sikh community took fancy on Binodini the leading actress of the National Theatre and wanted to start a theatre after her name. On the other hand, the Zemindar under whose protection she was then living, would not allow her to be an actress at all !

A few months after, the Zemindar however went home and was married. This was considered by Binodini, as a breach of promise and thus provided Girish an opportunity to bring Gurmukh Roy again on the field. But the Zemindar came back and would not leave Binodini at any cost. She was, however, removed by the party from Calcutta and kept in hiding at Raneegunge, Chinsura and other neighbouring places of Calcutta till all arrangements about the purchase of land and other things for the theatre were complete. In the meantime, when the operations were in progress, Gurmukh proposed to give Binodini Rupees Five thousand if instead of joining the theatre she would live with him. Although not

of noble origin, Binodini loved theatre and she would not give it up even for a kingdom. At last, when Gurmukh found that without starting the theatre it was not possible to enjoy her company, he agreed to get the house built. This is the history and origin of the 'Star Theatre' which was instrumental in bringing out some of the first class dramas of Girish, and raising theatre to a high moral plane!

The land had already been leased from the sons of Kirti Mitra, a rich citizen of Calcutta, and the construction of the stage at 68, Beadon Street was proceeding under the direction of Babu Jaharlal Dhur, Stage-manager and Dashu Charan Neogi his assistant. Babu Hari Gopal Bose was in charge of accounts and Babu Amritalal Mitra and Amritalal Bose were to assist Girish in rehearsals which were held at the house of Bonomali Chakravorty in Beadon Street. To crown all, a suitable drama was composed by Girish Chandra for the opening of the Theatre.

We shall quote here a few lines from Binodini's account of it,—"We used to attend rehearsals from 2 to 3 p.m. and finishing it there, go to theatre-house. Even after all departed, I used to draw earth and fill the spaces and in order that work might be expedited, used to fix 4 Karis each basket of earth. Work continued till late hours of night."

One thing however disappointed her—she was always under the impression that the theatre would be named after her as 'B' Theatre. The Proprietor wanted this, but Girish did not agree and wanted to name the house as the 'Star Theatre'. Girish thus consoled Binodini's mother—

> "Dont worry! we are ginger-traders and have nothing to do with the news of the ships. If theatre flourishes, there will be money, but if it fails, everything of yours will go. As I dont mind, let her not mind so. She is indispensable for my dramas and I wont work any where without her. Let us work giving the burden to others"

She was appeased.

Thus did the 'Star' open on the 21st July 1883 and *Dakṣa Yajña* was the first drama staged. It was about this time Girish was suffering from sceptic doubts and from great uneasiness of mind on account of these. Mill and Spencer influenced his mind a great deal. He doubted the existence of God. Like Hume he would say, "It is more probable that men should lie than miracles be true', In the above drama he drew the character of Dakṣa on a parallel with Milton's Satan who rebelled against the supreme God-head. Girish himself appeared in the role of the hero. Dakṣa's self-conceit, arrogance and spirit of revolt were his own and as the dramatist he displayed these in a masterly way. He appeared

with Promethean grandeur and solemn dignity uttering to himself :—

"How can I establish human race on earth ?" His scolding of *Satī*—"Disgrace is felt by the honourable only, what does it mean to a begger ?" —rang in one's ears for days together. Indeed Girish's impersonation of Dakṣa was to apply the remarks of Victor Hugo on Lamaitre's Ruy Blass not transformation but a transfiguration."* Satī, his daughter was fittingly represented by Binodini and Mahadeb by Amritalal Mitra. Other parts were— Dadhichī—Amrita Bose, Prasūti—Kadambini, Tapaswinī—Kshetromoni, Nondī—Aghore Pathok, Bhṛṅgī--Probodh Ghosh, Bhṛṅgī's wife--Gongamoni.

Amrita Mitra fully sustained his part and while mourning over the self immolation with the expression "Give me back my devoted spouse—*kere dere Satī de āmār, Satī Satī kothā Satī,* he sent a thrill of grief in the hearts of the audience. As to how Binodini did full justice to her part, Girish himself left his reminiscences."—

"The performance of Satī's part gave proofs of Binodini's dramatic talents from start to finish. Only a single question *Bi-yay kīmā* "what is marriage mother ?" exhibited talents of a high order. For one who would discuss in the next Act on the highest form of Yoga, with her husband, the Lord Śiva,

*Vide *Indian Mirror* 4th April 1393.

this might appear as a piece of affectation. But Binodini showed a conception as if Satī was so much steeped in meditation for Digāmbara—the naked Mahadev who personified the universe—that she was unconscious of worldly sense or concern. In the next Act the all-merciful mother of the universe anxious for human beings puts the question rather anxiously,

"Tell me, O Lord, why do you say
Blessed is the iron-age (Kalijuga) ?"

and she was superb when thus she took leave—

"If the woman brooks insult to her husband
For whom man should condescend to
prefer human life ?—
I am the daughter of the Lord of people
Why should I bear ignomy to my husband ?"

Dakṣa Jajña commanded a crowded house every night but before it was put on boards the theatre, it had been acted by Girish's party in presence of Goddess Kāli at Kalighat.

After this drama was staged, a miracle appeared in Girish's life. Divine Mother appeared before him but since it may not be appealing to many, I would rather not relate it. Mysteriously, however, he was not seen on the stage, except on very rare occasions in old plays for the next ten years till Macbeth was brought on the Boards of the Minerva

Theatre. We do not know the cause of this long absence from the stage, but Babu Amritalal Bose and others explained to us as above. Hence forward, all the leading roles in new dramas were given to his most worthy and affectionate disciple Amritalal Mitra. But his fame as a masterly dramatist began to spread steadily day by day. Indeed his fame as a writer henceforth elipsed that of an actor.

The next piece staged on 11-8-83 was *Dhruba Caritra.* It had its origin on the story related by him as a Kathak (reader of Pauranick legends) some time ago, basing it on Mahābhārata. Bhusan Kumari's Dhruba was on the whole good and so did Uthānpāda by Amrita Mitra.* Its songs were as much attractive as the finding of the Padma Palāś Lochan by the five-year-old boy in the forest.

After this, the famous mythological romance, the *Nala Damayantī* from Girish's pen was staged on 15th Dec. 1883, and the cast was as follows:—

Nala—Amrita Mitra, Vidușaka—Amrita Bose, Kālī—Aghore Pathok, Pușkar—Nilmadhob Chakraberty, Damayantī—Binodini, Sunandā—Bhusan Kumari, She-Brāhmņ—Khetromoni.

It is in *Dhruba* and *Nala Damayantī* that

* Other Characters : Suruchi—Binodini, Suniti—Kadambini, Vidușaka—Amrita Bose, Mahādev—Upendra Mitra, Nāroda—Pathok, Brahmā—Nilmadhab Chakravarti.

Girish's genius in the creation of fools or Vidusakas had its first germ.

After that Gurmukh Roy wanted to sell the theatre as his desires were satisfied. His relations, too, took him to task for his association with theatre. Shortly after he fell ill, and the sale-deed was executed for Rs. 11,000 in favour of four persons as selected by Girish. These joint-purchasers were :—

(1) Babu Amrita Mitra, (2) Dashu Neogi, each of whom paid Rs. 2,000. (3) Hari Gopal Bose who paid Rs. 1,000 and (4) Babu Amritalal Bose who did not pay anything but whose association was intended by Girish for his literary merits as also his histrionic talents and personality. A sum of Rs. 10,000 was raised by mortgaging the house to Babu Haridhon Datta with whom they were on terms of friendship and Rs. 10,000 was raised by the performances of *Nala Damayantī* at the Exhibition that was opened during the X'mas of that year.

Thus did the Theatre pass from the hands of the pleasure-loving rich man to the hands of the middle class gentlemen who had taken up stage as their only avocation in life.

Besides, the directors were all expert in the line. Amrita Lal Mitter was a great actor, Amrita Bose was a comedian of rare merits, Dashu Neogi, an excellent architect of the stage and Hariprasad Bose

a shrewd man of business and clever in keeping accounts.

In this first year of the new proprietorship, *Kamalekāminī* was exhibited on the 20th March 1884, when the sunrise on the sea, and a ship wrecked in a storm were of grand scenic beauty. Padmā in the air without aid of wire or string or other support, and instantaneous transformations from Chandi to Kāli and from an old woman to Chandi constituted also great improvements of mechanical devices of the stage.

In the next piece *Bṛṣaketu* staged on the 26th April 1884 with Upendra Mittra as Karṇa, Binodini Padmābati and Bhushan as Bṛṣaketu, wonderful decapitation was exhibited for the first time on the Bengali stage. Two pieces were added to *Bṛṣaketu*—one *Hirār Phool*, an opera by Girish and another—a farce by the comedian Amritatal—*Chatuyya Bāḍuyya* adapted from *Cox and Box.*

Girish Chandra *Śrīvatsa Chintā* was staged on 7th June 1884 with Amrita Mitter as Śrīvatsa Binodini Chintā, Amrita Bose Bātool, Aghore Pathok Sadāgar, Bhusan Bhadrā, Gongamani Lakṣmī and Nilmadhab Chakravarti as Śanī (Saturn).

The panoramic scene of the twilight of the dawn suddenly converted into mid-night with the stars shining, was really brilliant.

Bātool was a unique creation and was the predecessor of Ākāl in Asoke.

It was by that time that Girish's religious conviction grew deeper and deeper, but his spiritual monitor could not yet be found. *Chaitanya Līlā* was written in this turn of mind, and at this period of spiritual transition. The book has beautifully depicted the various phases of his life and his faith. Jagāi and Mādhāi represented the gradation of that faith, how Mādhāi beat Nitāi with a broken piece of a *Kalsi,* a water jug, and how Jagāi prevented him *Mādhāi mārilo, Jagāi bārilo* and wanted the *Kṛpā* of Nitāi and Nimāi. Since that performance Girish came to be treated by the puritanic section of the people with better consideration. Binodini appeared in the role of Chaitanya. She seemed to excel herself, in this part—in all its phases, as a boy, as a scholar, and last in the great renunciation. The drama was such a marvellous success that people began to flock from all quarters to hear *Kīrtans* on the stage. *Hari bol, Hari bol, Haribol* and *Keśav kuru karṇṇā dīne* became the favourite songs for the boys in the streets and of people at home. The success of the play may be gathered from the few words of Binodini:—

"I had much apprehension as to how I would tide over the critical test, I used always to call "Thou, Gour Hari, the deliverer of the depressed, pity this fallen and trodden woman". On the night previous

to that of the play, I had no sleep during the whole night. The thought as to how the play would be a success worried me whole night. In the morning, I went to the Ganges for a bath. Then I wrote the name of Durgā repeating the same for 108 times and begged of the Lord so that He might give me protection in that great ordeal and that I might attain His blessings. But throughout the day, I entertained great doubts and fear as to the success of my play. However, after the performance was over, I came to know that my trust in Him was not in vain. The cultured and the common people, all began to speak in the most glowing terms about the performance as a whole and specially about the part I had played. I also felt that Gour had been kind to me. During the *Bālya Līlā*—as a child, when I proceeded with the song—*Rādhā bole nāiko āmār, Rādā bole bājāi bańśī*, an energising force filled my heart and gave me strength. When taking the garland from Mālini, I asked her "what dost thou see mālini ?", my eyes used to lose their power of vision and saw only through the inner light. I saw nothing of the outside. I used to see the matchless beauty of Gour's feet in my heart and to feel that Lord Gour was directing me and that I was simply carrying out His directions. The limbs of my body used to tremble in joy—The whole atmosphere seemed to be covered with clouds when I used to reason with the professor and addressed *Probhu*,

kebā kār ? shakali shei Kṛṣṇa—O Lord, what is this mundane relation, everything is He—the Kṛṣṇa. Exactly it struck me who am I to others? when I used to recite.

"Gayā dhāme herilām bidyamān
Biṣṇupada-paṅkaje kariteche madhupān
Kata śata koti aśariri prāṇi."

'Many an invisible spirit I found drinking embrosa from the Lord's feet in the shrine of Gaya.'—

"It occured to me that some one was whispering these words in my heart—I was nothing—my self-consciousness seemed to have been extinct. After accepting renunciation when I used to adress mother during leave-taking—

Kṛṣṇa bole kāṅdo mā janani
Keṅdanā Nimāi bole
Kṛṣṇa bole kāṅdile sakal pābe
Kāṅdile Nimāi bole
Nimāi hārābe Kṛṣṇa nāhi pābe.

Mother ! Don't weep for Nimai
But weep for Hari
You will get everything if you do so
But weep for Neemai you lose both me and him.

"Some of the audience, specially the women often used to cry so loud, that my heart began to palpitate audibly. Mother Śachi's heart-rending wailings

excited my heart and the long sighs of the audience used to throw me so off my balance, that I began to be blinded with tears of my own eyes. Next, after becoming Sanyāsi, when I used to sing during the Saṅkirttan—

Hari man majāye lukāle kothāi
Āmi bhabe ekā deo-he dekhā
prāṇa sakhā rākha pāye.

O Lord! Where hast
Thou hid thyself
After stealing my heart?
I am quite alone in the wide wide world
Appear to me,
Keep me at thy feet
O the friend of my bosom.

"I can not adequately describe how much my own feelings choked me. One night, when the house was very much crowded, I fell down unconscious in the exuberance of feelings, while playing the part of Chaitanya. Father Lafont was present at the theatre on the night and came inside the stage after the curtain was down. Hearing of my condition from Girish Chandra he wanted to see me once. The latter brought him in my presence, and when I regained consciousness, I found that a tall old man with long beards was rolling his fingers on my body. As soon as I got up, Girish asked me to salute the Father. When I bowed down to him with my

palms joined together, he placed his hand on my head, rubbed it for for some time and asked me to drink a glass of water. I was all right".

As to how the drama was appreciated even by persons like Colonel Olcott, the great theosophical leader and president, and the great journalist, Shambhoo Chandra Mukherjee, will be evident from the following extracts.

(Mr. Shambhoo Chandra Mukherjee, Editor, "Reis and Rayat", after a performance of Chaitanya Lila)

Defence of The Stage—Expostulation With The Puritywalahs.

"In gratitude for one of the most pleasant and memorable nights we have enjoyed for a long time, we are bound to inform our readers that we have been to the Theatre—even to that much anathematised Bengali Theatre, where, as a rule, men are men and women women and, on appropriate or desperate occasions, women personate beautiful young men, but never men, black men, venture on the preposterous game of looking like beautiful women. Of course, the men who play may not all be above the gentlemanly vices, while the women, it may at once be taken for granted, are not drawn from ladies of the bed-chamber, though doubtless they will compete with many of these, in natural parts or acquired graces or even in virtue. We know our risk, but duty must be done and the truth

told. If the theatrical world of Beadon Street be Hell and no mistake, we have been to Hell and returned. We have returned, too, without a conscious taint; not only as we went but better. Yes, if our word is worth anything in the matter, we were not put up to auction directly we entered the precincts of the notorious Street and sold body and soul to the devil. We found no traces of Old Nick there, unless a young scapegrace, rather the worse for liquor, who lounged on a bench behind the orchestra and kept mocking at the players without power to make himself a formidable nuisance, was one of his camp-followers. Nor did the old gent appear to us since. Truth to confess, we are all the better for our visit. Physically it was exhausting in all conscience. For the curtain did not finally drop till a quarter past 2 in the morning, and we did not get our carriage and out of the crush of the street till a quarter to 3 o' clock—the Police arrangements being far from perfect. But spiritually we distinctly profited by the healthy recreation—the noble diversion. We wish the Puritywalahs—we shall not degrade the historic name of the stern, dreadfully-in-earnest if deeply misguided men who upturned monarchy in England or left in a huff for newer worlds—could be persuaded to follow our example. Let the morality-mongers try a dose of the sublime Morality of the *Chaiṭanya Līlā*. We would not care to discuss with them any proposition in morals if they could remain unmoved—if they did not

come back sadder and wiser men—with the healthy sadness of earnest cheerfulness and the true wisdom of the heart. The *Chaitanya Līlā* indeed is a moral exercise alike for players and audience. The play, a dramatisation of the Vaishnava Scripture, is scriptural without the alloy of the disgusting side of ancient manners. The language is chaste throughout. The make-up, in the gross as well as in every particular—the attitudes—the bearing and conduct—all were unexceptionable. What a contrast to the bawdy suggestiveness of the European Stage! We wish European gentlemen would come and see how far acting may be effective without meretricious aids or the attraction of the naked female person. Probably the average play-goer will vote Star Theatre too insipidly proper. The difference is characteristic. The contrast between the sober fully-dressed Baiji of sober motions, and the fidgety ballet-girl with her insufficient or flesh-coloured covering and her figdety leaps and curvets, is but a type of the contrast between the thorough respectability of the Hindu Stage and the doubtful propriety of the European theatre. We can assure the reader that we particularly watched the Star Theatre in its moral side, and are bound to declare it irreproachable. We found not a single lapse in any particular or in any person at any point. Perhaps, we ought to mention that for once, only in one scene, we observed an actor in the character of a religious Brahmin expose his abdomen, but this was simply disgusting,

without being suggestive. It was true to character, and it is not regarded with disgust in India where Mussalmans and Hindustanis, men and women, Nawabs and Begums, all habitually expose their paunch, so it might pass without remark. It sickens us, however, and as Europeans often visit the Star Theatre, the company had better avoid an unnecessary offence. But, as we have said, it is not indecent in the sense of immoral—of which kind there was absolutely nothing.

No man can sit for half an hour in the Star Theatre without being struck by the general superiority —the high tone—of the acting. The players are evidently experienced in their art. There is not to be seen a trace of 'prentice hand' in any particular. The firm grasp at once places the whole business decidedly above the level of faltering or halting amateur effort. The genius of the people is suited to the stage. Their perspicacity, their adaptability, their suppleness, their dexterity, all easily lend themselves to histrionic art. Nevertheless, we were surpirsed to see the number of good players....(*Reis and Rayat, October 10, 1885*)

Colonel Olcott on "Chaitanya Lila"

His reply to the above

"THE NATIVE THEATRE"

"Sir : I have read with approval and admiration your manly defence of the Indian Stage. I, too, while at Calcutta recently accepted an invita-

tion to witness the performance of *Chaiṭanya Līlā* and the impressions I brought away were the same as your own. There had been so much platitude written against it in certain papers, that I was glad of the opportunity to see and judge for myself. I have been for some years promoting a movement for the revival in our country of the ancient high standards of Aryan morals, and whatever affects the spiritual and moral interests of Indian youth has for me a deep interest. I have in this spirit for years been an ardent friend of the movement for reformation in Native music, as represented in the Bengal Academy of Music and *Poonā Gāyan Samāj*, founded respectively by my friends Rajah Sir Sourendra Mohun Tagore and Mr. Bulwant Trimbak. Their aim is to replace the vile lascivious songs in vogue by spiritualising classical hymns and other compositions of the Aryan forefathers. A pure stage and pure music are among the most potent agencies for the philanthropist to employ. It is too late in the day to argue this question ; it has long ago been settled to the satisfaction of all but narrow western bigots. Of course, the personal character of actors and singers is always an interesting, though subordinate question, and coterie paribus, right feeling persons always prefer to see and listen to performers who, like mesdames Nillson, Mary Anderson, Ellen Terry and many others, enjoy the reputation of unblemished private lives, rather than to others in all walks of the drama-

tic profession whose lives are impure. Yet after all what the public principally go to see and hear is the play, the opera, or the concert, and the bad character of the artist is something quite apart from and subordinate to the ideal he or she pesonifies for the moment. I need but appeal to any travelled European in India for evidence that the above is true, and that, while female virtue, considering the enormous temptations to which actresses are subjected, is quite as common on, as off, the stage, the play-going public of all the countries of Christendom habitually tolerate, patronise and almost worship actresses and actors of flagrantly impure lives. As you say the Indian Stage has not come to that, and the only question of the moment is whether it will be impracticable to so elevate the profession in this country as to make the dramatic career inviting to respectable native ladies by its honours and emoluments.

My official engagements since I came to India in 1879, have been so constantly exacting that only thrice in India and once in Ceylon have I had the time to visit the theatre. At Bombay I saw *Sītārām* and *Hariśchandra*, at Calcutta *Chaitanya Līlā*, at Colombo *The Merchant of Venice*, done badly on an open-air stage by a company of Sinhalese amateurs. I am free to say that the three Indian Dramas taught me more and made me more deeply admire and understand the stories they respectively illustrate than would have ten times the same number of hours spent over books. I think my

enthusiastic appreciation of Aryan character is to some extent due to the impressions thus conveyed. As for the *Chaitanya Līlā* I unhesitatingly affirm that it is impossible for any one but a "civilized" peg-drinking Babu, like the one you say misbehaving himself on the front bench of the orchestra, to witness the play without a rush of spiritual feeling and religious fervour. The poor girl who played Chaitanya may belong to the class of unfortunates (alas : how unfortunate these victims of man's brutishness), but while on the scenes she throws herself into her role so ardently that one only sees the Vaiṣṇava saint before him. Not a lewd gesture, not a sensual glance of the eye, not the slightest suggestion of animal desire, like those which make up the attraction of nautches to their patrons. I am a psychologist and watch faces for signs of hidden emotion. At the Star Theatre in Beadon Street, there was not a symptom of any bad influence working in the audience ; while at every nautch the signs of lustful desire are but too evident, and by the dancer, encouraged by responsive look and gesture. So thoroughly does the Star actress feel the emotions of the saint she personates, so intensely arouses in her own bosom the religious ecstasy of Bhakti Yoga, she fainted dead away between the acts the evening I was there, and a medical man who shared my box had to go behind the scenes each time to administer restoratives.

Sir, I hate above all things cant and hypocrisy :

and while I shall ever be among the first to denounce and oppose every agency I find working against public morals, I cannot withhold my expression of sympathy for the courageous defence you have made of the Native Stage in this week's paper. If we must have only virtuous women as actresses and singers, all right ; but then in fairness to that helpless class we drive into absolute vice, let us be equally stern in the cases of European prefessionals, the priests of religion the world over, not in India alone and of the writers and critics of sorts who era denouncing the drama from high pedestals. Hypocrites in religion, in virtue, in politics, in trade, in science—the world is full of them : And India included, from the sham loyalist, with his reception-hall full of political mottoes and portraits to the sham ascetic, who paints and dresses himself to play the part of the holy mendicants of yore. There is but one fit place for people of this class—Chaneph, the fabulous island of Rabelais—"wholly inhabited by sham saints, spiritual comedians, head-tumblers, numbers of avemarias, and such like sorry rogues who lived on the alms of passengers, like the hermit of Lormont."

Yours
H. S. Olcott.
Adyar, the 17th October, 1885.

Now *Chaitanya Līlā* not only raised Girish very much in the estimation of the public, but paved the

way for higher things—the meeting with his Guru through whom he would at last attain the real mission of his life. It was here that Pandit Mathuranath Padaratna from Navadwipa came to see a performance and was so much beside himself with joy, that he touched Girish Chandra's feet and blessed him with the words "Gour Chandra will fulfil the desire of your mind." Yes, Gour actually did so.

It was at that time when the fame of *Chaitanya Līlā* spread far and wide, the great Ram Krishna Paramhansha one night came with his disciples to see its performance. Girish gave an account of this visit in his reminiscences about Ram Krishna and we have it also from *Rām Kṛṣṇa Kathāmṛta* from the pen of another disciple, Babu Mohendra Nath Gupta, who had accompanied him three times to the theatre. When a disciple asked him "How did you find it ?", Paramhansha Dev replied :

Āshal Nakal Ek Dekhlām

"I found the imitation and the real to be identically the same."*

After the play was over, Binodini had the good luck of a darshan (look) of him. She touched his feet. Sri Ram Krishna danced in joy singing '*Hari Hari*' and blessed her : "May you attain Chaityana or knowledge *i.e.* self-consciousness,"

* For a full description we refer to our readers *Śrī Śrī Rāmkṛṣṇa Kathāmṛta*, 2nd part.

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It was a red-letter day for the Bengali Stage that it was favoured and blessed by so saintly a person (whom thousands went to see and to touch his feet) that came to seek his own dear one from the obscurity and impure elements of the stage.

The great devotee and Yogi Bijoy Krishna Goswami, on seeing a performance of the same on an occasion, danced as if in a trance.

Chaitanya Līlā also acted as a renaissance of Hindu religion and culture at that critical time in the national history of Bengal, when young Bengal, England-returned anglicised Babus and the Brāhmos predominated in the educated society. The religious faith of the whole Hiudu community was greatly revived by the religious sentiments so deeply incorporated in the drama. Thus says Babu Amritalal Bose about it :

"In cities and villages *Sankirtan* parties were formed, various editions of the Gītā and Chaitanya's life flooded the country. Even an England-returned Bengali instead of feeling any sense of shame rather proudly began to proclaim himself as a Hindu". His 'Ode to Girish' also composed after the latter's death, conveys the same idea :

"Who else but Girish of Bengal
Will play upon the lyre?
The stage became a shrine of pilgrimage,
And the theatre, a resort of the devotees!

"Horns and trimbels were sounded with glee
Hymns of glory were sung on the stage,
The head of the dandy bent down with humility
And his eyes were bathed in tears!

"Hymns of glory swept over the country,
The earth was sanctified
The unfortunate pitied by the saint
Were rolling at Kṛṣṇa's feet.

"Girish's Sādhanā with the low
Sees Ram Krishna the assuager of all
sorrows.

"Śri Kṛṣṇa showed what was supreme good
In the form of Guru on the earth
Who had showered (upon Girish)
His condescension and love!

The drama of *Chaitanya Līlā*—which practically electrified the whole country—was the chief topic of the day. By this time Bankim Chandra by his *Anuśīlan* was drawing the attention of the educated Bengal about religion and culture and was rightly called the "Apostle of culture". Pandit Shashadhar Tarkachuramani and Swami Krishnānanda were delivering most impressive lectures on Hinduism, the Ādi-Brāhma Samāj was also giving lessons on *Upaniṣada,* and just at this hour Girish surcharged

the whole atmosphere of the stage with deep religious emotions that roused an unprecedented religious fervour among the people. Thus to a very great degree *Chaitanya Līlā* contributed to the Hindu-awakening and Hindu revival.

This devotional drama was followed by *Pralhād Charitra* staged on 22nd November. In Hiraṇya Kaśipu represented by Amrita Mitra, Girish more or less portrayed his feelings of a time when he felt an aversion towards Ramakrishna but unconsciously was his heart being drawn to him. Unlike the drama of Rajkrishna Roy, Girish's *Pralhād Charitra* was more a philosophical piece and while "the Bengal Theatre" was commanding crowded houses, Girish's drama, although Binodini acted as Pralhād, did not appeal much to the masses. Besides that *Shando* and *Amarka* of Roy's drama and songs, esp. of the snake-charmers, were very interesting. But what was lost in this drama was amply compensated by *Bibāha Bibhrāt*, a farce by Babu Amritalal Bose which accompanied Pralhād. This young dramatist was a comedian of no mean order who had already earned raputation with his *Chorer Upar Bātpāḍi* and *Chatujje Baḍujje* (staged on 26th April '84) adapted from "*Cox and Box.*"

Bibāha Bibhrāt was a farcial comedy treating of marriage problem in modern Bengal and was a

great success. All the parts were well rendered* and specially the part of Jhee, the maid-servent, rendered by Khetromoni was highly successful. Both the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal and the Viceroy of India on seeing the performance in a private house exclaimed—"So powerful an artist can scarcely be seen even in a London Theatre of these days" and the Marchioness of Dufferin too who accompanied her husband was so much struck with the acting that she did dot forget to refer to it with appreciation and praise in her "Our Viceregal life in India", from which we quote below, the following:

A Native Entertainment

1885, 23rd January—Monday. Invited by Rai Jogadananda Mukherjee we went in the evening to a native entertainment in his house. To get at this we drove through the bazars, long streets of mud and bamboo hovels where native colouring and local smells were rampant. Groups of people were standing about and greeted us with clapping of hands as we passed. Near the gate of the house there was a great crowd and a military band was playing there.

We were seated in front of the stage and when the curtain drew up, some very substantial

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* Mr. Singh—author himself. Mrs. Kāraforma—Binodini, Jhee—Khetromoni, Kartā—Nilmadhab Chuckraburty—(afterwards Bel Babu), Nando—Aghore Pathak, afterwards Probodh Ghosh), Bearer—Kashi Babu.

fairies were revealed standing on equally substantial flowers, and they sang the following lines in Bengali :—

"As stars round Luna's bright throne wait
When the blue vault from cloud is free
Thus girt with officers of state
Our noble Viceroy here we see.

We bless our Empress Queen who sent
A peer so just this realm to sway
With hearts and feelings reverent
Let us to him our homage pay.

And gladly now it will be our task
By art dramatic to beguile
This noble audience—we but ask
Your kind applause, your lenient smile."

"Then the play began. It was called Matrimonial Fix and we were provided with an English resume of the plot. It is a farcical satire upon the native element who set to England for 10 months and who is supposed to come back dressed in European clothes and having forgotten his own language; and upon the educated female who is represented as giving her husband a scientific lecture upon heat, which drives him out of the house while she, during his absence makes love to a kindred and educated soul with whom in the last scene she absconds. The dress and absence of dress look more remarkable on the stage than off it. D. still saw ancient Roman in their legs. I still saw ordinary men

in cotton sheets. In one scene a bride-groom appeared naked to the waist, with a red loin-cloth as a costume while in the next he was clothed in a full suit of broad cloth ; the match-maker was highly clad, the bride-groom's father wore the sheet or toga, the women were fully draped.

"The best actor was a maid-servant (Khetromoni) who seemed to say very sharp things and when she and her mistress had a disagreement the scolding on both sides was loud and stormy. As a study of manners and customs, the play was most interesting. It was in two Acts and at the end of the first we were taken into the house and upstairs where a new joy awaited us."

Sometimes this farce accompanied *Chaitanya Līlā* and it was no small wonder that two antagonistic parts of Chaitanya and Bilashini Karaforma could be performed on the same night by the same actress in one strain. The one was graceful and divine, while the other was full of levity and flirtations. It is more than half a century passed that such demonstration was put to exhibition. Few are alive now who can give oral testimony of the feats. We should, therefore, better quote from the "Reis and Rayyet" of the 10th Oct, 1885, from the pen of the distinguished journalist Babu Shambhoo Chandra Mukherjee, the following :

"Comparisons are specially invidious where so many are excellent players and most performed their

respective parts so well. Besides as we took no notes we may forget names and assign parts to wrong persons. We will run through the names as best as we can, to the best of our impressions and recollections of the two plays acted on Wednesday. In order to meet the convenience of European gentlemen who have to come a great way after dinner, the performance was timed to begin at 9 P. M. and even then of the plays, the comedietta or farce of *Bibāha Bibhrāt* or the Marriage difficulty was first put forward to allow them time to come up for the *piece-de-resistance*—the *Chaitanya Līlā* which was to be brought on the stage for the last time before the Puja vacation that night. It was, therefore, late before the *Līlā* was commenced. Between the two, the players were severely strained—for five mortal hours. Yet they went through it heroically and both the comic and serious plays were admirably performed Babu Upendra Nath Mitter is a valuable, all-round man. His Promatha Nath Mitter was good, but his Mādhāi, the Sottish robber, by profession who molests and robs the Vairāgīs and even attacks Nityānanda but is finally converted at the latters' intercession by the Mahāprobhu, was a hit. Jagāi was good but overshadowed by his companion. Kashi is a good singer and is the picture of a Vairāgī on the stage. His Toḍi was effective. Abinash a young man deceived every body by his thorough impersonation of stooping age in Śrīnibāsh. Mr. Ghosh perfectly rendered Nanda Lal the Boy of the Period in the comedy. Chaitanya's

Guru was not bad. "Captain Bell"—Gopinath Sircar the seller of his L. A. of a boy Nanda Lal for cash was first rate, though, for much the same reason his impersonation of Chaitanay's father was most disappointing. Gangamoni is not a bad actress but she wanted paint on her person. So did Bhusan Kumari who made such a miserable girl consort for the divine Guru. Gangamoni as Mrs. Gopinath Sircar was all right within her small sphere. Our young friend Amrita Lai is a young man of parts who has always distinguished himself in low comedy. He has now made a hit as 'playwright' by his "marriage difficulty" or "*Bibāha Bibhrūt.*" He naturally played his own character of Mr. Singh—the Baboo denationalised if not anglicised by a ten months' trip to Europe—with great spirit as well as fidelity. Nor must we forget the capital Ghatak and marriage broker Poran. Sosti, as the unfortunate husband of a she-graduate had a small part assigned to him in which he acquitted himself well. He was the picture of a cook-consort of a scientific grey mare. The ladies, as befits the fairest of Creation, took the highest places. *Bhunimani, no bad actress*, is a melodious nightingale who gives no small strength to a company dependent upon the support of a Yātrā-loving community. Khetromoni is a splendid actress, equal to almost any comic business and possing great declamatory powers for tragedy too. Her Dāsi in the comedy

caused roars, while her Mālinī in the *Chaitanya* drama showed her capacity for delicate work.

But last not least, what shall we say of Binodini? She is not only the moon of the Star company, but absolutely at the head of her profession in India. She must be a woman of considerable culture to be able to show such unaffected sympathy with so many and various characters and such capacity for reproducing them. She is certainly a lady of much refinement of feeling as she shows herself to be one of inimitable grace. On Wednesday she played two very distinct and widely divergent roles, and did perfect justice to both. Her "Mrs. Bilasini Kāraforma" the girl graduate, exhibited to say an iron grip of the queer phenomenon, the Girl of the Period as she appears in Bengali society. Her Chaitannya showed a wonderful mastery of the subtle forces dominating one of the greatest of religious characters who was taken to be the Lord himself and is to this day worshipped as such by millions. For a young Miss to enter into such a being so as to give it perfect expression, is a miracle. All we can say is that genius like faith can remove mountains.

In the year 1885, *Chaitanya Līlā* Part II by the name of *Nimāi Sannyāsh* was staged on the 10th June and here too, the part of Nimāi was acted by Binodini. The representation of this part was more difficult and recitation of the long passage

summarising Ṣaḍabhuja Darśana of Mahāprobhu with six hands, required physical and mental strain ; and here too she was a success. The piece had a run for about ten or twelve nights.

Prabhāsjajña commenced on the 30th may 1885 and had a run of about 10 nights. In songs, dances and in general get-up, it was a very entertaining piece and the audience was much delighted with the performance.

The drama of *Buddha Dev* was however staged on the 19th September 1885 and this too was a highly successful drama. *Kiṃbā Brahma Śaktihīn dukher mochane*—'Is Brahma—God—powerless to relieve sorrows !' gives an insight into the state of Girish's mind of that time when he had still doubts. Thus he enquires :—

"Where is God ! where does He live ?
I hear the world is a creation of His
Then why are there disease, sorrow and oldness ?
Why this world is an abode of miseries.
—*Buddha Dev.*

The appearance of Buddha in the palace of Bimbishāra and their conversation is one of the masterly pieces in Bengali Literature and from dramatic point of view also it created a great sensation. Babu Amritalal Mitter in the role of Buddha left an abiding impression on the minds of the

audience. Binodini too was very successful in the part of Gopā. Sir Edwin Arnold, author of *Light of Asia*, was present in one of the performances and praised Binodini's acting beyond measure. He felt that "the common populace of a nation could not so attentively witness such a performance unless the Hindu minds were very highly raised in metaphysics."

The light of the drama was no doubt drawn from Arnold's book, but it may be called an entirely original one, from all points of view.

About the elevated nature of the drama and its excellent representation by Girish's party, thus does *the Hindu Patriot* remark :—

> "Any writer on Buddha coming after Mr. Edwin Arnold's *Light of Asia* must, in the nature of things, derive his inspiration largely from that exquisite and incomparable Idyll and we are not surprised to see that the author of Buddhadeb Charita claims to be no exception. But even Mr. Arnold's manner of treating the subject had to be departed from, for dramatic reasons and so cleverly has the departure been made that Mr. Arnold himself when he comes to Calcutta in the course of his present tour and sees the hero of the poem on the stage will, we venture to think, have little reason to regret the departure. The get up of the play on the stage is excellent. The artists who maintain the characters of Siddhārtha and

Gopā acquit themselves in a highly creditable manner. No praise can be too high for the rendering of Buddha's appeal for mercy in the presence of the king Bimbīsāra which ultimately led to that monarch's conversion and the wailings of Gopā on Buddha's secret flight from Kapilavāstu. The chorus of the evil genii yields in no points to Bandmann's* rendering of the celebrated scene of Hecate in Macbeth. We are glad to notice that the efforts of this popular caterer of amusement are appreciated and patronised by the public. Babu Girish Chandra Ghosh has deserved well of his co-religionists and his contrymen by his endeavours to improve the moral tone of our stage to popularise Hindoo religion and to develop the slender literary and dramatic resources of the country.

Hindu Patriot, Dec. 14, 1885.

It is better that we should also quote a few lines from *India Revisited*† written by Sir Edwin Arnold himself, after he saw the performance :

"Another singular pleasure was to witness a performance of the *Light of Asia* played by a native company to an audience of Calcutta citizens

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* This company was showing Shakespeare's plays at Calcutta. The following stages of Calcutta where English plays were at that time shown were :—

(1) The Opera House.

(2) Theatre Royal, Chowringhee.

[3) Corinthian Theatre.

† *Vide* page 250. He left Calcutta on 12th March 1886.

whose close attention to the long soliloquies and quick appreciation of all the chief incidents of the story gave an idea of their intelligence and proved how metaphysical by nature these Hindu people are. The stage-appliances were deficient to a point incredible for a London manager and the *mise en scene* sometimes almost laughable in simplicity. Nevertheless, there was a refinement and imaginativeness in acting as well as an artistic sense entirely remarkable, and the female performers proved quite as good as the male."

Cast in Buddha was as follows :—

Buddha	...	Amrita Lal Mitra
Suddhodan	...	Upendra Nath Mitra
Śrīkāldev	...	Mohendra Choudhury
Chhandak	...	Bel Babu
Mār	...	Aghore Nath Pathak
Bimbīsāra	...	Probodh Chandra Ghosh
Gautamī	...	Gangamoni
Mahāmāyā	...	Bonobiharini
Gopā	...	Binodini
Sujātā	...	Promoda Sundari
Woman who lost her son	...	Khetromoni.

The next was the devotional drama *Bilwamngal*. It was staged on the 12th June, 1886, the theme being taken from the religious book *Bhaktamāl*. The hero, a dissolute Brahmin youth, squandered everything on Chintāmoni, a dancing girl, who lived on the other side of the Ganges. One day after having performed the Sradh ceremony,

he came on the banks of the river in the evening to cross it and come to Chintāmoni. But the river heaved and assumed a threatening aspect owing to heavy storm and rain and there was no boat, nor even a piece of wood there. It was all dark and he crossed the river at last, mostly with the help of a corpse which he found in the mid-stream and took it for a log of wood. Next, when he arrived at Chintāmoni's house at dead of night, he found the door bolted from inside but a deadly snake was there dangling from the window. Bilwa took it for a piece of string left by Chintāmoni for him and holding fast by it, climbed up the window into the room. Now the presence of Bilwa smelling so nasty with the worm-eaten decomposed body annoyed Chintāmoni beyond the measure and the sight of the snake next bewildered her. At that psychological moment she scolded him in these words—"this mind of yours if wert so deeply devoted to God, instead of to a woman of my origin, would do you good." These few words brought him to senses and led him to think of "Kṛṣṇa, the All-shelter". The next is the history of his struggle, ups and down again, and how ultimately he was blessed with the beautiful vision of Śrikṛṣṇa and Rādhā. The above story Girish developed into an intensely devotional and lofty drama with an exquisite art that defies all critical analysis. The world-renowned Swami Vivekananda

used to say of it,—"Fifty times I have read the drama, and each time I find new light in it". Sister Nivedita, Vivekananda's disciple and devoted to Girish as a daughter, was so much charmed with it that she actually translated a considerable portion of the drama into her own language. It is worthy of mention here that *Bilwamngal* was practically the first drama written by Girish after he obtained Ramkrishna Deb's blessings and accepted him as his Guru. Songs of Pāgalini and the teachings of Somgirī represent the great Paramhansa in his various phases and the highest truth of Vedantism—*Nirbikalpa Samādhi* is reflected in the words of Pagalini—

"Kabhu Ekākār
Nāhi ār Kāler Gaman
Nāhi Hillol Kallol
Sthir Sthir Samudoy
Nāhi Nāhi Phurāila Bāk
Bartamān Birājita."

"All is one and there is no distinction of night and day, present and past. That state is Nirvāṇa, when there is no stir, no noise and there is an end of the individual consciousness and one is immersed in the mighty ocean of supreme and divine bliss when every thing melts into Him".

Indeed *Bilwamngal* is not only rich in deep religious sentiments and lofty philosophical thoughts

but is also replete in dramatic elements as is provided by its minor characters* of varied interests such as that of Sādhak, Thāka, Dārogā, Chowkidār, Rākhāl Bālok and others. These characters are as living and vivid as their representations on the stage were quite graphic. "Kṛṣṇadarśner phal Kṛṣṇadarsan".—"The fruit of the sight of Kṛṣṇa is the sight of Śrīkṛṣṇa *i.e.* nothing remains after it, rang in the ears of all and a new wave followed in the Bengali stage.

Pāgalinī was represented by Gongamoni to a finish. Her words simply enchanted the audience, her songs thrilled their hearts and the deep philosophical significance of her expressions raised the cultured minds to a region of bliss. Binodini too did admirably, but there were Chintāmonis before, while Pāgalinī was a new creation, and in the competition Gongamoni carried off the palm and was crowned with laurels of praise. This fact, however, was responsible for the loss of the Prima-donna

* Bilwamañgal—Amrita Mittra, Sādhak—Bel Babu, Bhikṣuk—Aghore Pathak, Baṇik—Upendra Mitra, Shomgirī—Probodh Ghose, Ahalyā—Bhuni (Bonabiharini), Thāka—Khetromoni, Purohit—Shyam Kundu, Mañgalā—Khoṇra Kusum, Dewan—Mohendra Chowdhuri, Pāgalinī—Gangamoni, Servant—Parān Sil, Chintāmonī—Binodini, Dārogā—Upendra Mitra, Chaukidār, Siṣyas—Ramtaran, Shyam Kundu, Rākhāl (cowherd boy) Kashi Chatterji Janaika Sthrī—Promoda Sundari,

from the Bengali stage altogether, as Binodini took umbrage at this and misundrstood Girish's action. She determined to leave the stage and the Raja under whose protection she was then living promised her more help. The Bengali stage lost a great artist but there was no help. It was difficult for Girish to satisfy her vaunted pride which had grown for some time past in her—a curse that accompanies success and renown in cases of many a person. The last piece she appeared in was *Bellickbāzār*, an X'mas skit where she acted the part of Rañgini, and that of Alakā which was fixed for her in *Rupasonātan* was taken by another actress. The last days of Binodini, however, were devoted to the service of *Gopāl* (Kṛṣṇa) and although she lived up to the age of 78 years with her grand children, she was never, after this, associated with any theatre.

The part of Sādhak was inspired by Paramuansha himself to Girish. The spiritual guide in the role of such imposter showed to Girish what the conception of such character should be. The part was super-excellently represented by Bel Babu but subsequently when Girish himself used to appear in this role, the people got the true and exact conception as suggested by Ramkrishna Dev.

The acting of the drama left nothing to be desired more and on the opening night when about 850

persons came to witness the play, it was a grand sight to see all the audience from box to gallery following scene after scene with rapt attention, and then, at the end, declaring in a body with ecstasy that the play was an unqualified success.*

The last drama in the Star was *Rupasonātan*† which too showed how Girish entered into the secrets of Vaisṇava Religion, but as some unhappy incidents occured in the play, its performance was not repeated.

Here too Mr. Amrita Bose's Subuddhi was superb. *Rūpasonatan* was closed, but even the leading Vaisṇava preachers used to say that unless one had entered into the inner conceptions and beauties of the Vaisṇaba Religion, it was not possible for him to write such a devotional drama. Bel Babu was Chaitanya by inspiration and when he used to call Sonātan who was then in prison, his raised arms became stiff as that of a dead man.

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* *Vide* contemporary papers *Indian Daily News* and *Englishman.*

†Chaitanya Dev—Bel Babu, Sonāton—Amritalal Mitra, Rūpa—Upendra Mitra, Bullav—Kashinath Chatterjee, Iśān—Mohendra Nath Chowdhury, Subuddhi—Amritalal Bose, Jivan—Nilmadhob Chakravarty, Hossein Sah and Robber—Aghore Pathok. Rāmdīn and Śrīkānta—Probodh Chandra Ghosh, Nasir Khan—Shyama Charan Kundu, Choubey boy—Kusum, Alokā—Bonobiharini, Karuṇā and Choubey's wife—Gangamoni, Biśākhā—Kironbala.

Many, including Dani Babu examined this to their great surprise.

Thus when the Star Theatrical Company under Girish's tutelage and constant care was at the zenith of its success, a great rival arose in the theatrical world. Babu Gopal Lal Seal who inherited the vast property of his millionaire grand-father Motilal with a cash of about Rs. 30 lacs, felt a hobby to start a theatre. The idea was prompted in him when he went to see a performance of *Bellickbāzār*. It is said that he took great offence at the expression of an actress which was explained to him as a reflection on his dark complexion. Gopal Lal now wanted to have the Star Theatre for himself at any cost. He first purchased the land where the theatre stood, at Rs. 64000 from the son of Kirti Mitra, another millionaire of Calcutta and served the theatre-proprietors with notice for ejectment. The widow of Kirti Mitra had however a lien on the property. Girish now saw the lady and persuaded her to apply to the High Court objecting to the above notice. Thus came the chance of an honourable settlement. The pavilion was eventually sold at Rs. 30,000 but the good-will of the "Star" remained with its former proprietors.

The last performances on this stage were on the 31st July 1887, when *Buddha* and *Bellickbāzār* were repeated and as to the pathetic scenes that marked the leave-taking ceremony, we would better

quote the *Indian Mirror* of the time, which was corroborated by Bengali papers notably *Nava-vibhakar and Sadharoni* edited by Akshay Chandra Sarkar, of the year 1294 B.S. page 198. *Mirror* runs thus :—

> "On the last night, so great was the popularity of the troupe, that the house was filled to the brim and hundreds had to be sent away for want of even standing-room. At the conclusion of the performance Babu A. L. Bose one of the prômising and prominent performers came forward and on behalf of the members who stood in the rear announced the fact of the pavilion being passed in the hands of Babu Gopal Lal Seal who was going to start a theatre club of his own. Then Babu Amritalal gratefully acknowledged the patronage that had been accorded to the company during the last four years. That they had catered for the public in that pavilion, craved pardon for their short-comings and concluded by expressing a hope that their patrons would continue their kindness towards them, should the company resume their performances elsewhere as they shortly expected to do. The sympathetic silence with which the affecting address was received unquestionably proved the popularity of the corps with the play-going public who had mustered strong on the occasion to bid the company *au revoir*."

A new site at Hatibagan (the present situation) was found and the land was purchased. Now the

Star Company intending to raise some money for the construction of the building left for Dacca and other places. At Dacca they began to show some performances from 22nd August 1887, at the East Bengal Stage which was just to the south of the Present Jagannath College building and just to the east of the then Jagannath School. As in 1873 and 1879 the troupe met with serious trouble this time also. Some of the Brāhmos and people of the puritanic ideas began to dissuade people—specially students—from seeing the performances and the sales were thus much affected. The *Dacca Prokash* (1294 B.S. Bhadra 12) however really echoed the general feeling. Thus it wrote :—

> "We have been much gratified to see the representation of *Chaitanya Līlā* and *Dhruba Charitra*. Both are pure and soul-stirring. *Sītār Bonobās* too, was performed very successfully. The *Star* is the foremost of all theatres.
>
> "There were *nuches* before in the same place by the dancing girls and none objected, but now they come forward with resistance. It appears Brahmo brothers are at the bottom. If in seeing a performance for two or three hours, one's passions are excited, because women are seen on the stage, then that person should not see women at all."

But the trouble did not end. Miscreants began to throw stones on the corrugated iron-shed of the stage, and the house to the west was suspected to be

their rendezvous. The theatrical party was much dis-spirited and information was given to the police. The district judge Mr. Place also took up their cause favourably and asked lawyers of Dacca to help them. But the trouble continued; Mr. Clarke, the Superintendent of Police, himself came to attend the scene every night, and matters came to a climax when two students were brought to him with stones in hand. Those boys were rather roughfy handled and the whole student community was made to take this as an insult to them.

The matter did not rest there and two notable persons Mr. Paresh Nath Ghosh the great wrestler and Mr. Prasanna Kumar Guha the cricketeer both teachers of the Jagannath School and both—specially the former—held in high esteem and love by the public of Dacca were rather unjustly suspected to be at the bottom. These two gentlemen were now made special constables to be on guard there at the time of performances. Their presence instead of abating rather aggravated the situation. Sensation prevailed, sales fell down and in the trouble and propaganda that followed, the company had to leave Dacca with a broken heart on the 16th September 1887. We get the following again from *Dacca Prokash* on 2nd Aswin 1294 B.S.

"The conclusion that the whole student community was insulted at the arrest and persecution of two of the miscreants who used to throw stones

> constantly, to the loss and annoyance of the whole community, was possible from narrow-minded, and injudicous people only, but no sensible man would think like this."

This was the unfortunate result of the tour, but this was nothing in comparison with the further reputation that was in store for the Star Theatre.

Sādhu Vijoy Krishna Goswami was then Minister of the Sādhāraṇ Brāhmo Samāj, Dacca, situated just to the south of the Theatre. He used to say "there the people create row, here I fall in trance with the songs of Chaitanya Lila which come to my ears."

NATIONAL THEATRE

We left the account of the "National Theatre" with *Chhatrobhanga* in 1884. In the following year when Bhuban Mohan Neogi inherited some property, he purchased the pavilion on a conditional sale from Protap Jahuri in the name of his wife Bhubonmohini. He now re-opened the National Theatre on the 27th August 1885 with the help of Babu Dharmadas Sur and staged Pandit Haribhusan Bhattacharyya's *Kumārsambhab* with Thakurdas Chatterji as Mahādev, Mrs. Sukumari (Golap) as Ratī, Chhotarāṇī as Durgā and Purna Ch. Ghose (Music-Master) as Madan.

On the 3rd July 1886, National Theatre with Kedar Chowdhury as manager staged *Raja Basanta*

Roy dramatised by him from Rabindra Nath Tagore's novel *Bou Thakurāṇīr Hāt.* The cast was again brilliant with—

Radhamadhab Kar as Basanta Roy, Mohendra Bose as Uday, Moti Soor as Protap, Purna Ghose as Anaṅgamohan, Harimoti as Bibhā (afterwards called Bibhā-Hari), Chhotorāṇī as Surama, Bhabatarini as Rāṇī, Lakshmi as Maṅgalā, Babu Nil Madhab Chakravarty as Ramchandra and above all Mr. Mustafi who returned from pretty long travels played the part of Ramāi Bhāṅḍ.

The acting was good and the songs of Mr. Kar entertaining.

Ānandamaṭh was repeated with the original cast and Babu Radhamadhab Kar as Mr. Thomas. As before, Bankim Chandra was very much annoyed. Sometime after, he wrote the following letter to Girish Chandra :—

"My novels are being badly dramatised by others. You are a powerful writer and are possessed of great talents and you can know the mind of the author. I hope earnestly that my writings, through your efforts may attain great and unexpected success.—(Āśār Atīta).*

Notwithstanding the artists, the Great National Theatre was closed in October 1886. In a suit by Jahuri on the allegation that Bhuban Mohan though insolvent, himself purchased the property in the name

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* *Vide* : *Nava'* & *Sadharani* Kartiç 15, 1294 B.S.

of his wife, a decree granting permission to sell the pavilion was passed. On the auction-sale that followed, the Star company purchased it and had it demolished, probably with a view to keep no two rivals on both sides of it.

GIRISH AT THE EMERALD THEATRE

After the Star Theatre left the house at 68, Beadon Street, Babu Gopal Lal Seal began to spend money like water to secure artists of both sexes and opened the Emerald Theatre on the 8th October 1887 under the management of Kedar Nath with his *Pāndava Nirvāsana.* But the theatre promised not much success. It now struck Gopal Seal to secure Girish at any cost, but the Star Theatre could ill afford to spare their guide and master (Guru). Gopal, however, offered him a bonus of Rs. 20,000 Rupees Twenty Thousand,with,again,a pay of Rs. 350 a month, putting up at the same time a threat that unless Girish agreed to come, he (Gopal) would secure all the artists of the "Star" by offering any wages and thus strike at its very root. Girish accepted the job in the interest of the "Star Theatre" and gave the proprietors a sum of Rs. 16,000 out of his bonus for the construction of the new house at Cornwallis Street, keeping for himself only Rs. 4,000 in the way of the salaries that were due to him as manager of the Star for the past few months. When

the above sum was given, Girish distinctly gave his disciples a piece of advice in the following words:—

> **"After being harrassed by different proprietors, you are now your own masters. See that no gentleman coming under your protection do ever suffer in your hands,"**

At the time Girish joined the Emerald Theatre, *Bidhabā Sankat* a worthless piece was still running on, and the *Indian Mirror* found fault with Girish for having "with all his elevated tastes allowed such a scandalous piece being put on boards." But as soon as Girish came, he allowed *Nīladarpaṇa* to be acted on the 27th November 1887, which was again followed by *Sītar Banabās*, *Mṛṇālinī*, *Meghnādbadh*, where Girish appeared in his usual roles. But the greatest attraction was Girish's *Pūrṇa Chandra* staged on 17th March 1888 which at once raised the sale of tickets to a sum varying from Rs. 800 to Rs. 1,000, then considered the maximum for a performance on the stage. Our readers should remember that, at that time, gallery ticket was sold at As. 8 and those of pits and stalls Re. 1 and Rs. 2 respectively.

Pūrṇa Chandra was a devotional drama (idea being taken from a Hindi drama *Pūrāṇ Bhakat*) and showed to what height of religious plane Girish had arisen. The perfor-

mance with a powerful cast* was highly successful and the editor of *Reis and Rayyet* rightly remarked that the high bonus paid to Girish was realised from the performance of *Pūrṇa Chandra* alone."

In *Pūrṇa Chandra* Girish showed how for some persons it was possible to rise above lust and lucre, and Ramkrishna Dev was reflected in the character of Sādhu 'Gorokshanātha'.

The next piece was *Bishād,* another drama from Girish's pen, the representation of which was very successful from the first performance on the 5th October, 1888,

The story of *Bishād* was taken from *Bhaktamāl* and Girish showed how Sarasvatī served her husband, Alarka, who did not like her, and became his attendant in the guise of a boy, as Bishād, at the house of his mistress Ujjwalā. The part of this Bishād-Sarasvati was so ably acted by an actress named Kusum that she was henceforth called Bishād Kusum. The other characters were olso satisfactorily performed by the artists as follows:—

Alarka	...	Mohendra Bose
Mādhab	...	Moti Sur

*Rājā Shāliban—Mohendra Bose, Pūrṇa Chandra—Mrs. Sukumāri Dutta, Dāmodar—Moti Sur,. Seva Das—Chuni Mitra, Charmakār—Shib Chandra . Chatterji, Ichatrā—Khetromoni, Sāree—Kusum (Bishād), Sundarā—Chhotarani.

Shibarām	...	**Hari Bhusan Bhattacherjee**
Ujjwalā	...	**Chhotarani**
Sobāgi	...	**Khetromoni Devi**
Birohini	...	**Purna Ghose.**
Thieves	...	**Shib Chatterjee, Kumud Sarkār**
Rājmātā	...	**Gulphan Hari**
Dāndi	...	**Dashu Babu**

Coming events cast their shadows before. Sarasvatī (Bishād) and her death were probably the premonitions in the poet's mind of the coming death of his wife Surabala who breathed her last about two months and a half after this, on 25th December, 1888. She was a devoted and pious lady and gave Girish full domestic happiness.

After the sad event, he did not stay any longer in the Emerald Theatre. But how he got out of the meshes of Seal, will be seen in the next Chapter.

Chapter III

The Star Theatre (at Hāti Bāgān)

After the company bade farewell to the audience at the Beadon Street, selling the Theatre to Gopal Seal, the proprietors without delay purchased a plot of land measuring 30 cottas on Rs. 27,000 from Babu Ramendra Krishna Dev and his brother of the Shovabazar Raj family, out of the money they received from Mr. Seal. The pavilion was then built partly with funds secured at mofossil towns and mostly with the amount of Rs. 16,000 which Girish gave them from out of his bonus. Some money was also borrowed. The proprietors were not greedy, and used to take each an allowance of Rs. 40 only, a month. By their frugal management, they succeeded in having built the theatre which still now stands as an imposing edifice in North Calcutta at 79/3/4 Cornwallis Street.

Now to appear with its former reputation that the Star had acquired under Girish, the need of a suitable drama was very sorely felt. But who would produce it except Girish Chandra ? He was however then in the employ of Seal and could not help the Star openly. He, however, devised a plan to write a drama for his disciples during the late hours of

night on the side of a canal in the east, going there in the robes of a woman, as some people still say, and thus concealing the thing entirely from the knowledge of his master. With the drama now produced, the Star Theatre was opened in its newly-built house. The authorship was kept a secret and *Nashirām* the afore-said devotional drama was hereafter published as the composition of "Sevaka", that is, one dedicated to service.

The new building was designed and decorated by Babu Jogendra Nath Mitra of the State Railway Service and Babu Dharmadas Sur had it so very gorgeously illuminated by gas lights that it looked like a fairy mansion.

It was on Friday 26th May 1888, when the Theatre first opened at 9 P.M. Babu Amrita Lal Bose, the Manager, first appeared on the stage with a white Punjabi shirt on his person, and read a short poem composed by Girish Chandra which begins thus—

Hear me, ye good people.
It is after a year's sorrowful exile
That we greet you again with due respect.

The cast was as follows :—

Nasirām	... Amrita Bose
Jogesh Nāth	... Upendra Mitra
Anāth Nāth	... Amrita Mitra
Kāpālik	... Aghore Pathok

Sambhoo (Kapalik's disciple)	... Bel Babu
Rāj Montrī	... Mohendra Chowdhury
Birojā	... Kadambini
Mādhurī	... Harimoti
Sonā	... Gongamoni
Bhutnāth	... Probodh Ghosh

We quote here a few lines from the celebrated actor Babu Amarendra Nath Dutta's reminiscences* about the opening night :

"That was a Friday the day of Phooladole. It was the first night of performance at the Star of Hati Bagan. We entered inside. The decorated house looked like the palace of Indra. A beautiful house that enchanted the eyes, a row of numberless brilliant lights, spectators dressed in different dresses all crowded together—I was beside myself with joy. I wondered where had I come. Such splendour, such beauty, such captivating sights appeared before my eyes for the first time. I thought if such bewitching was the outside beauty, what heavenly sights were hidden behind the screen ! This was what I told to my friends after my visit to the Star. Words fail to describe what I saw that day. From that evening my aspiration was to be an actor."

Nasīrām presented Ramkrishna Dev and inculcated the evils that ensue from lust, lucre and pride. Although it was not expected to appeal to

* Vide his biography by Upendra Nath Vidyābhusan P, 12-16.

the ordinary audience, yet the performance was highly successful. Babu Amrita Bose acted very well the part of Nasirām, and Gangamoni's songs were soul-stirring.

Babu Amrita Bose, the manager then rendered the famous Bengali novel *Svarṇalatā* by Babu Tarak Gangolee into a drama—under the name of *Saralā*. *Svarṇalatā* was one of the most popular fictions of the time and the death of Sarala, a living personation of devotion, sacrifice and sufferings touched every human heart. The play, with Śaśī Bhūṣaṇ and Promodā, Bidhu Bhūṣaṇ and Saralā, Gadādhar and Nīlkamal* with pathos and laughter combined, drew crowds for a time but after a few nights the audience waned thinner and thinner and the necessity of another powerful drama was keenly felt.

We have said before how Girish felt the degrading company of Gopal Seal and was looking for an opportunity to shake himself off from the unholy surroundings. His wife, as we said before, also died in the mean time. He now began to pull strings from behind and Gopal Seal was found unwilling to continue the theatre in his own name. It was now

* Śaśī Bhūṣaṇ—Nilmadhob Babu Bidhu Bhūṣaṇ—Amrita Mitra, Śyāmā—Gangamoni, Godādhar—Bel Babu, Promoda—Promodā, Saralā—Kiranbala, Nīlkamal—Paran Seal, afterwards Amrita Bose, Manager.

leased to Babus Moti Lal Soor, Hari Bhusan Bhattacharyya, Purna Chandra Ghose and Brojolal Mitra. No sooner was this done than Girish left the Emerald on the legal plea that the contract stood with Seal alone and not with his lessees, and he (Girish) was under no obligation to serve them. No sooner did he leave Emerald than the news spread like any thing and the proprietors of the Star greeted their Guru as their "Manager", only on the offer of a paltry sum of Rs. 250 a month which Girish gladly accepted. The Star now rose at the meridian and no dearth of dramas was possible now.

On coming to the Star Theatre Girish composed his first social drama *Profulla*, got it rehearsed for about two months and had it mounted by distinguished artists on the 27th April 1889. This social tragedy—indeed one of the greatest tragedies in the world's literature, has since been repeated from thousands of platforms and like Shakespeare's Hamlet, has never grown stale nor lost its beauty and charm. The gradual stages of Jogesh's fall, delineated psychologically, require the highest skill of historionic art for their representation. Mr. Mitter however carried the palm with his gifted voice and his stage-suiting appearance. The other artists also did well. We need not dilate more, but of one artists at least it will be no exaggeration to add that not to speak of his youthful period, but even in his ripe old age it was a treat to see him appear in the

role of Rameś and that was none but Babu Amrita Lal Bose. The cast was as follows :—

Jogeś ...	Amrita Mitra
Rameś ...	Amrita Bose
Sureś ...	Kashinath Chatterji
Bhajahari ...	Bel Babu
Madan Dādā & 1st Bepāri	Nilmadhab Chakraborty
Kāṅgālī Charan ...	Shyama Charan Kundu
Ek Jan Lok (Siṅger) ...	Aghore Pāthok
Magistrate ...	Ramtaran Sanyal
Jamādār & Bank Dewan	Upendra Mitra
Inspector ...	Probodh Ghose
Suṇḍi ...	Sashi Chatterjee
2nd Bepārī ...	Akshoy Chakraborty
Inspector & Jail Doctor	Pada (Binode Shome)
Mātālinī ...	Bonobiharini
Jagamonī ...	Tunna Moni
Jñānadā ...	Kironbala
Umāsundarī ...	Gangamoni
Profulla ...	Bhuson Kumari
Jādāv ...	Tara Sundari
Bāriwāli ...	Elokeshi
Khemtāwālī ...	Promoda, Kusum (Khonrā.)

Profulla made the stage more dignified and serious and as to how the play was received at the time, we think it proper to quote the observations of the *Statesman* in the editorial columns that appeared in three issues of the paper of the period.—

21st May, 1889. (Monday)

PROFULLA (At the Star Thearte)

The new social play *Profulla* by the wellknown

dramatist and manager of the above theatre Babu Girish Chandra Ghose was produced before a crodwed house on Saturday last. The drama is based upon the incidents not uncommon in real life in Hindoo Society and is intended not only to amuse but equally to impart instruction and moral lessons. A brief description of the plot may not therefore be uninteresting. Jogesh represented as a self-made wealthy merchant who regards honesty as the best means for attaining temporal as well as spiritual prosperity. His family consisted of a widowed mother, his wife and a minor son, two younger brothers Ramesh and Suresh and sister-in-law Profulla—Ramesh's wife. These he respected and cherished with all tenderness and paternal affection and used to pass a pleasant life. Suddenly there was a turn of fortune, his business failed involving him in large liabilities which he intended to pay off at the sacrifice of all his properties but to drown his sorrows, he took to intoxicants while his brother Ramesh who was on the contrary a monster of wickedness and treachery contrived to cheat the creditors and his brother too by transferring all the estate to himself. This he succeeded in accomplishing and thus reduced him to the condition of a beggar. Not being satisfied with this Ramesh planned to poison his brother's child in order to make himself indisputed master of his wealth, but his wife Profulla discovered the conspiracy and while expostulating with him of his villainous attempt

was so violently assaulted by him that she died. Here ended his sins ; he was arrested by the police and justice was meted out to him. Mr. A. C. Mitter played the part of Jogesh admirably and showed how strong is fraternal love amongst the Hindoos and what misfortunes are brought upon a Hindoo family by that curse—drink. At the same time his wife Jnanada showed how Hindoo ladies adore their husbands (even if they are drunkards) that they donot scruple to sacrifice their lives for their husbands' comforts. A. C. Bose sustained the part of Ramesh and showed virtue ultimatly triumphs over vice and what fate awaits the avaricious for their deception and covetousness. Profulla the wife of Ramesh on the other hand is the model of piety and chastity and moved the audience to tears. Her untiring efforts to reform her husband drew the admiration of the audience. The friendship of Suresh and Sibnath is enviable. The Police Court and the Garanhatta Grog-shop scenes were life-like.

June 8.

THE NATIVE THEATRE

The New Tragedy at the Star

We have noticed briefly in our leading columns the sensation which has been produced by the new tragedy of Profulla at the Star Theatre. The central characters in the piece are Jogesh, Ramesh, Profulla and the plot is simple although its evolution is dramatic and sensational in the extreme. Jogesh is a man of means and

position both of which he has acquired by the persevering labour of thirty years. He is of generous disposition, a fact proved by ample allowances he makes to the members of two families. His brother Ramesh very much resembles the character of the wicked brother in Schiller's "Robbers". He takes advantage of the weakness of Jogesh for strong drink to ruin him while he continues to get hold of the fortune of the remaining members of the family by the most unscrupulous and abominable methods. Profulla, his wife frustrates his attempt to poison a young boy who stood between him and his wishes, when the villain in his fury fells her to the ground. Jogesh meanwhile is ruined, degraded and reduced to beggary through drink, his wife dies in the streets and the other members of the family suffer the direst poverty. The incidental scenes are in keeping with the general tenour of the play and all tend to the one great purpose of pointing a deep moral. A description of the principal characters will give our readers some idea of the drama. Although ruined by drink Jogesh has at times a sense of his degradation and his sentiments may be expressed in the words of Cassio :

O thou invisible spirit of wine if thou hadst no name to be known by, let us call thee devil."

He knows the value of a good name and expresses himself almost in the words of Iago—

"Good name, in man or woman, dear, my lord,
Is the immediate jewel of their souls ;

Who steals my purse steals trash : 'tis
something nothing.
'T was mine 'tis his, and has been slave to
thousands
But he that filches from me my good name
Robs me of that which not enriches him :
and make me poor indeed.

Suresh though a wayward lad, and somewhat addicted to bad company is not without his good points. He generously saved the wife of his brother Ramesh from the indignity of attending a police court and his dear friend Sibnath from the consequences of being a *particeps criminis* in a false charge of theft. He nobly strikes to avoid dragging his brother's wife and his friend into the mire and although quite innocent accepts with calmness and fortitude the heaviest punishment the law can inflict. Iago works upon the jealosy of a husband to madden him to the crime of killing Desdemona —his wife. Ramesh out-rivals this villainy by conspiring to ruin the brother Jogesh to whom he owes all he has, and not his elder brother only but his younger brother Suresh whom he succeeds in imprisoning upon a false charge. He next attempts to starve to death his young nephew Jadav. Decoying him into a scheduled apartment he imprisons him there with the intention of starving him to death. He is deaf to the passionate entreaties of the lad for water and prepares instead a poisoned draught wherewith to quench the poor fellow's thirst. His wife Profulla who is the angel of

goodness in these dark scenes saves the boy by employing a supposed lunatic to trace him and rescue him from the death that seemed so near. The supposed madman hesitates at first to give Profulla any clue to the finding of the boy; but her solemn warning that he must shortly appear before Dharmoraj to give an account of his deeds strikes terror into his heart and he atonce conducts her to the room where the boy is imprisoned. Shaken to the depths of his soul by the warnings of Profulla that he can not vanish from his minds, he declares himself no longer mad but striken with the fear of Dharmaraj and straightway resolves to save the life of the boy by the magic powder Pārā Bhugsha in his possession which he had preserved for the renewiug of his own youth and prolonging his career of crime. Profulla's noble week is done, the boy is saved while the madman is clothed and in his right mind. The villain Ramesh comes to the knowledge of what his wife has done and at first tries to dissuade her from opposing his course, but finding her resolved, he strikes a fatal blow at her in his passion which causes her death. Nothing could be finer than the dying words uttered by Profulla to her husband who is a demon in human form. Her last breath is to entreat pardon for her murderer from the Almighty power that rules mankind. The agony of the mother of Jogesh on hearing of the imprisonment of her son which combined with the numerous villainies of Ramesh dethrones her reason, affords

room for a very moving dramatic scene. We are now introduced to the faithful servant Pitambar who is ready to lay down his life for his master Jogesh. We fear we have wearied our readers however, and must give the final development of the play in another issue.

June 9

Profulla has the reputation of being remarkably well enacted at the Star Theatre under the immediate supervision of the author. The character of Jogesh is strongly limned. The change from the noble minded generous man who voluntarily divided his property which he had taken thirty years to acquire among his brethern and to the poor, heartless, degraded and hopeless drunkard was depicted with great dramatic force that had an evident effect especially that part where he is represented as begging in the streets and even at the funeral of his wife craving for a glass of wine entirely oblivious of the solemnity of the situation. It is a relief to turn from this black picture to the character of Jnanada who calmly and uncomplainingly suffers the privations brought about by the conduct of Jogesh, her drunken husband. The heroism with which she welcomes death in the streets, alone and unbefriended, drew tears from many eyes. Here is a truly beautiful character and many of her sayings are pathetic in their simple truth and feeling. In a conversation with Profulla she tearfully observes that she could observe the death of the starving boy Jadav if she could only have the pleasure of seeing him get a good

satisfying meal even for a single day. That the countenance is an unerring index of the heart was exemplified in the case of the wife of the native doctor Kāṅgāli whose hideous mien is quite in keeping with her detestable disposition. She upbraids Ramesh for his softness of heart and when he is touched by the cries of the boy and is about to give him a draught of water she dissuades him from doing so and steels his heart against the promptings of humanity. It reflects very great credit on the artists of the Star Theatre that they enact their allotted roles with conspicuous ability and success. Admitting the great force and power of this drama, an opinion has been expressed that the fate of Jogesh might have been made to end differently. It is said that the shock of meeting his starving wife dying in the streets might have the effect of reforming him altogether causing him to renounce strong drink and, as one critic said, spending the remainder of his existence in penitence for the past and devotional exercises. We have to congratulate the talented author and the able manager Babu Girish Chandra Ghose on the very great success they have achieved and we recommend the public to see the play and judge for themselves.

It is always hazardous to hunt for personal sentiments of the dramatist from a drama. But we may say that Jnanada's death-scene very appropriately reflects Girish's own fellings after his wife's death, and the bitter cry of despair 'Āmār Sājāno Bāgān

Śukiye Galo' (my trim garden has withered away) seems to have risen from the depth of the dramatist's heart.

Profulla was followed by another social drama *Hārāṇidhi.* Though the drama does not end in bitter tragedy, the first three Acts give, however, a very masterly representation of the sufferings and despair of an honest house-holder who was the victim of a foul conspiracy. Hariś the hero of the piece is that unfortunate victim.

Hārāṇidhi too was greatly influenced by the above sad incident and the character of Sushila is mainly drawn after his lamented wife Surabālā The cast was as follows :

Mohinī	..	Upendra Mitra
Hariś	...	Amrita Mitra
Aghore	...	Bel Babu
Nilmādhab	...	Kaśi Babu
Naba	...	Mahendra Choudhury
Dharaṇī	...	Probodh Ghose
Tej Chandra Bāhādur	...	Ranu Babu
Bhāirab	...	Nil Madhab Chakraverty
Brojendra	...	Poran Krishna Seal
Dhanirām	...	Shyama Charan Kundu
Sonāullā	...	Umes Chandra Das
Haimabatī	...	Jagat Tarini
Kamalā	...	Kiran Bala
Suśhīlā	...	Nagendra Bala
Hemāṅginī	...	Tara Sundari
Kādambiṇī	...	Gongamoni.

After *Hāranidhi* had a run for fourteen nights or so, the Star Company lost the most powerful comedian Babu Amrita Lal Mukerji popularly known as Captain Bell or "Bel Babu" whose Gadādhar or Bhajahari or Aghore stands unrivalled still to-day. His death—one of sucide—was a very tragic one and the three dramas could not further be proceeded with owing to his death which melancholy event took place on the 11th March 1890. His talents which were rather extraordinary, our pen would be too feeble to depict and we would therefore quote the few lines from the contemporary *Reis and Rayyet* of March 18, 1890 :—

"DEATH OF BEL BABOO"

One of the most popular figures of the native stage of the metropolis has been removed by the death, by his own hand, of Amrita Lal Mookerjee, better known as "Bel Baboo." The young man belonged to a well-known Brahman family of Calcutta, the house of illustrious Durga Charan Mookerjee. He showed a turn for mimicry from the time when he was a little boy, which afterwards developed into unmistakable genius. His histrionic powers were indeed so remarkable that he could always command attention. He became a favourite of the audience as soon as he joined the professional stage, a little over eighteen years ago. Before the pre-actress days—the Age of Darkness, as it may fitly be called, of the modern

Theatre—his impersonation of female roles was as clever as his later male performances were uniformly successful. His Mallika in Dinobandhu Mitter's *Nobīn Tapasvinī* is not likely to be forgotten by any one who ever witnessed it. Not the cleverest of lady artists has ever been able to over-shadow or even equal him there. After the introduction of actresses, up to the time of his death he filled innumerable characters, in none of which, serious or comic, he failed to make an impression. Always happy in his conception. it was rarely that he overstepped the modesty of nature. But it was more in comic than in serious impersonations that "Bel Baboo" betrayed his wonderful force and versatility. His very appearance was a signal for *fun* and he spoke and strutted upon the boards amidst the deafening cheers of an audience turned mad with laughter. Comedy was his forte, and in comedy, he was equally at home, in the high and the low. He was the man who introduced harlequinade of the native stage. As harlequin, he was without a rival ; he has hardly yet found an imitator. It was marvel what an artist in high histrionics was this volatile buffoon. As Gadadhar Chandra in *Saralā*, Bel Baboo was more than delightful—simply charming. Gadādhar Chandra will never allow its interpreter to fade away from our memory. In modern India, genius in any art languishes for want of proper appreciation, becoming more a source of mortification than pleasure to its possessor...

> the Bohemian's art has yet to be recognized amongst us. In the West, the death of a comedian, like the late Amrita Lal Mookerjee would be regarded as a great social, if not a national, calamity. Here, in our unformed society, nobody thinks of noticing publicly his death or regards it as much of a loss, and no momento perhaps will remain of his worth except in the wicked columns of *Reis and Rayyet.* Of course, the Star Theatre was closed on last Wednesday out of respect to the memory of this Prince of Actors, who was one of its main pillars.

Bel Babu's death was soon followed by the death of another talented artist Miss Kiron Bala who stepped into Binodini's place as the lady actress of the 'Star' after the latter retired from the stage. She was a tragic actress of rare merit and was seen exhibiting five different postures and emotional poses in the five acts of the domestic piece 'Saralā'. Who knew that the death-scenes of Saralā and Jñanadā shown by her in both the roles to perfection would be the forerunner of her own death? The Star Theatre openly mourned the death of Kiron Bala and the audiance fully reciprocated it. Of her, too, we shall quote the *Reis and Rayyet* of April 1890 which noticed the sad event in the following lines .—

> Death has plucked away another 'Star' from the native stage. The heroine of the 'Star' boards

—Srimati Kiran Kumari is dead having fallen a victim to the fell epidemic of smallpox of late raging in the city. The dead actress was a rare flower of her profession—another young genius who promised to burst before long into full bloom and splendour. In so young an age, she betrayed extraordinary talents. To natural versatility and a clear fancy, she joined a good fund of vivacity and nervous pluck that removed every obstacle before. On the retirement of the former heroine from the stage an actress of unrivalled ability, she was chosen out, while yet very young and in the initial stage of her apprenticeship, to fill the vacancy, to the mortification of the veteran lady-artists who had all hoped for the prize of promotion. It was a nervous step in all conscience for both the veteran manager and the young novice. But the trepidation was all over with the first night of the experiment. The sudden and irrevocable resignation of the lady "Star" had plunged the manager into a sea of despair, and the wreck of his bark on the rocks ahead of incompetency seemed imminent. Indeed, the success of the rather bold experiment averted what may be called a financial disaster. The young novice proved to be the real pole-star of the manager's hope to save his theatre from the impending peril. That very night she reassured all hopes and belied all fears. The test she was put to was trying for the nerves of any actor or actress in the world. She had to

interpret Chaitanya, perhaps the most difficult of Bengalee dramatic characters, and in her delineation of it she proved herself thoroughly deserving of the exalted lift, if not equal to her glorious prédecessor. Ever since she was fixed to fill all the title roles and she filled them with equal credit. Her great drawback in the acting of these old parts was the brilliant triumphs of her predecessor, the glowing tints of which could never vanish or fade from the memories of her audiences. She knew this and wisely contented herself by imitating the great actress even at the risk of being considered affected and artificial—the inevitable result of all imitations. But soon the day of her true appreciation came. The new drama of the realistic school was placed upon the boards, the title role being alloted to her. As Saralā, she might be said to have made her real debut, and as Saralā, it is enough to say, she can never be forgotten, for, even now, at the mention of the picture, many a playgoers' eyes must glisten with a tear. In short, if her imitations were wonderful, her own work was simply marvellous, and Sarala proved the greatest of financial successes to her employers. The Star Theatre has sustained in her death, occurring so soon after that of the inimitable 'Bel Baboo', a loss which is beyond *repair, unless indeed the old heroine reappears on its boards*, while the lovers of the native drama have lost one who, perhaps born to be society's curse, wonderfully converted herself

into a boon which afforded them very high and healthy intellectual treats.

Reis and Rayyet
April 1890

The *Englishman,* too, calls her a Bengali Siddons and in its issue of the 24th June 1890 Tuesday reproduces the above observations of the *Reis and Rayyet* confirming its assertion that really the "Bengali Theatre is a temple of high art".

These tragic happenings* gave a serious blow to the 'Star' which had to close its doors for three months, after which Girish Chandra's *Chanda* a historical drama taken from Rajput legends was put on boards on the July 26, 1890. It was the fore-runner of his great patriotic dramas *Satnām, Sirājuddula, Mīrkāsim and Chhatrapati Śivājī* and in the hero of this piece Girish stressess on the selfless attributes of a real nation-builder.

Babu Amrita Mitra appeared in the title role and was ably matched by Dani Babu, in the role of Raghudev whom, the former (his guru) introduced for the first time in the public stage as a professional artist. The other characters were represented as follows by the following celebrated artists :—

* It may interest our readers that for Bel Babu's efficiency in performing the part of Aghore in *Hārāndihi*, this drama was dedicated to Bel Babu's memory by the publisher at the author's request.

Pūrṇarām Bhāt	...	Amrita Bose
Raṇamalla	...	Nilmadhab Chakravorty
Śikhandī	...	Upendra Mitra
Mukuljī	...	Tara Sundari
Jodh Rāo	...	Probodh Ghose
Gunjāmālā	...	Nagendra Bala
Bījurī	...	Mrs. Sukumari Dutta
Kuśalā	...	Tunnamoni
Bhīl Sardār	...	Aghore Pathok

We need not tire our readers' patience with details of Girish's *Malinā Bikāś* (staged on 13th September 1890) but will pause here with a few words for Girish's *Mahāpūjā* an X'mas skit composed on the occasion of the sixth session of the Indian National Congress held at Calcutta. To serve the Mother-land requires self-abnegation—was the theme of this very short piece and all the contemporary papers including *Dacca Prokash* spoke highly of Girish and the 'Star', but alas, misunderstanding soon occured and connection of the one ceased with the other.

The apparent cause was that some of Girish's dramas *Mukul Muñjarā* and *Abu Hossain* which here-after got warmest reception at the Minerva Theatre were rejected by the proprietors of the "Star" as worthless. But the real cause was that "Star" now learnt to stand on its own legs, and found that its *Saralā* and *Tājjab Byāpār*, *Bānchhārām* and *Tarubālā* from the pen of Babu Amrita Bose (although the last drama was thorougly recast by

Girish Chandra and its 5th Act was completely written by him), were attracting spectators. So in its brighter days now, 'Star' failed to show the consideration due to the father of the Stage and commenced slighting him as an 'Old fool'. What brought matters to the climax was that Girish's child, the only son by the second wife, was then lying very ill and while he was staying at Madhupur for a change necessary for the dying son, he was presented with a letter of dismissal on the ground of irregularity in attendance. The company also found a dramatist at the time in the person of Babu Rajkrishna Roy, late of the Binā Theatre.

As a protest against such ingratitude, a large number of actors and actresses left the Star and began to show performances with Mr. Nilmadhab Chakravorty as their manager and guide, at some private houses under the name of the 'City Theatre' staging Girish Chandra's dramas already acted at the Star. The latter company was enraged at this and considering, rather wrongly, that Girish was at the bottom, began to take retaliatory steps not only against the 'City Theatre' but also against Girish.

Early in May 1891, when a performance was arranged at the palatial house of Babus Nondalal Bose and Pasupati Nath Bose of Bagbazar, the Star Theatre Company moved the Hon'ble High Court asking for an *ad interim* injunction against both the

dramatist and the new Company. The application however, was refused as Mr. Justice Wilson wanted the Star authorities to have the matter settled with Girish, since the latter in his (judge's) opinion was the principal man through whose effort Drama and Stage attained such a high status in Bengal. For the facts of the case we would better quote the *Hindu Patriot* of the time (May 11, 1891).

> "We regret to notice that the proprietors of the Star Theatre and their late writer and manager have fallen out to the extent of going to court. It appears that Girish Ghosh's connection which was renewed not long ago, after he left the Emerald Theatre, ceased in March last and a rival company was formed under his guidance which have been giving performances of his plays in the houses of native gentlemen. The last of these performances was intended to be given at the residence of Babus Nando Lal Bose and Pasupati Nath Bose. The proprietors of the Star Theatre strongly objected to the proposed arrangement and Mr. Jackson Bar-at-Law, instructed by Babu Gonesh Ch. Chunder moved the High Court on Saturday last on their behalf for an *ad interim* injunction prohibiting the intended performance. Mr. Justice Wilson to whom the application was made while admitting the plaint and granting a rule *Nisi* refused to make the order for *ad interim*. His Lordship thought that the plaintiff, had not been sufficiently diligent in preferring their claim to the exclusive right as several re-presentations

had already been given by the rival company. Nor did his Lordship think that a sufficiently strong case had been made out for such a stringent order considering that the guests of the Brother Boses who must have incurred considerable expenditure in getting up representations would the disappointed. As Babu Girish Chandra Ghose and the Star have been instrumental in raising the status of dramas and dramatic representations in the country, in the interest of histrionic art, the dispute should be settled."

After this, the above 'City Theatre' took a lease of the Vinā Stage* and began to show performances there in the same name. On the 16th May 1891 *Chaitanya Līlā* was staged and on the 17th *Saralā*, Promoda and Mānada playing in the roles Promodā and Saralā respectively. Both did well and Manada was highly spoken of at that time by all the papers. *Batlte of Plāssy, Sitār Banabās Nala Damayantī, Bilwamangal, Buddha, Tarubālā Bibāhabibhrāt, Bellik Bazār, Tājjab Byāpār, Molinā Bikāś* were also acted.

Differences of the Star with Girish Chandra were, however, made up on the 4th June, 1891 but the suit against the "City" continued. Eventually the "Star" lost the suit on the ground that when a play is once published, no action lies.

The following is the substance of Mr. Justice Wilson's order.

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* Of the Bīnā Stage, history will be given later on.

"The plaintiffs allege they are the proprietors of certain dramatic plays and the defendants have acted these plays without their permission. In answer to a question the piff's counsel stated that the plays had been printed and pulished for sale. It is clear that according to common law no such suit would lie (Murray vs Ellison). In England by Statute the right to represent plays is protected by certain statutes, 5 and 4 William IV and 5 & 6 Victoria. It is clear these statutes do not apply to works published in India (Reutledge vs Low). There is no such Act in India. There is a Copy Right Act passed by the Indian Legislature which protects copy-righs properly so called, but not the right to represent plays. The result is, there is no law in India under which such right can exist. The plaint therefore discloses no cause of action and the suit will be dismissed with costs."

In the meantime Girish lost his young son and he was much pulled down. He then left for his spiritual guide's house at the villages of Kamar Pukur and Joyrambati in company with another brother-disciple and lived for a few weeks under the motherly care of Mā, the devoted consort of Ramkrishna Dev. Having full solace and bliss from the holy mother,* he now set his head and heart to the further improvement of Stage and Drama.

Girish now secured a lessee for the land of the old National at 6, Beadon Street in the person of

* . Readers may get some glance at the story 'Bāngāl.

Babu Nagendro Nath Mukerjee, grandson of the millionaire, late Babu Prasanna Kumar Tagore and with his help wanted to have a pavilion built up. Great was the enthusiasm and the work procceded rapidly. But the City troupe now raised trouble. Nilmadhab wanted a theatre like the Star Company and insisted on having shares. The lessee, however, wanted to have his debt cleared first. Girish too asked them not to press for any share of profits till the incumbrances were removed. This disappointed the troupe and they now parted,

Girish thus finding himself alone, gave Nagendra Babu all possible help and co-operation and under his proprietorship started the theatre with the assistance of a few young artists only, *viz* Dani Babu, Chuni Babu, Ranu Babu, Pada Babu, Kumud Sarkar etc. In the mean time the vateran comedian Babu Ardhendu Sekhar Mustafi also came to join him.

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* as translated by Girish Chandra was selected for the opening night's performance and arrangements for rehearsals were made in a room rented in that quarter.

About this time Girish as an invited guest in the house of Babu Kali Krishna Tagore witnessed the performance of *Bibāha Bibhrāt* and saw the part of 'Jhee' being very successfully rendered by Tincowrie Dasi. Girish found in her a suitable heroine for his theatre and had therefore brought her in. Thus the troupe was complete for his purpose.

Chapter IV

MINERVA THEATRE.

The year 1893 heralds the dawn of a new era in the dramatic world of Bengal when the Bengali stage was considerably improved and reached a further degree of perfection, entitling it to be favourably compared with the stages of the other civilised countries. Girish had the theatre built in the most up-to-date fashion and with the artists coached and trained by him proved to what height of perfection dramatic art of Bengal could reach. As he wanted classical dramas to be staged here, he liked the theatre to be named as "The Classic" but yielding at last to the request of the proprietor had it named as the Minerva Theatre.

The first drama staged here on January 28th, 1893 was *Macbeth*—the bengali rendering of Shakespeare's historical tragedy of the name, translation being made by Girish himself. Stage management no doubt was left to his friend and associate Dharmadas Soor, but dresses were under European management and make-up rightly in the Scotch-fashion of medieval period was done by Mr. J. Pym. Scenes too were painted by Mr. Willard the well-known painter of Calcutta

of that time. Songs put in the mouth of the witches also had their tunes borrowed from the book "Renowned Songs of the world" secured from Harolds' firm at the Dalhousie Square. An instanee may be given here as to how Girish spared no pains to make the show interesting all round. There was a song in the book which Girish considered very appropriate for the witches. He translated it in his usual way and put it into their mouths which highly enhanced the interest in the play.

The song of the above book runs thus :—

"White spirits and Black
Black and spirits and Grey
Mingle Mingle Mingle
All that Mingle may"

and the translation, too, by Girish was just fitting and easy as—

"Dhāla Kāli Katā Lāli
Mile Jule Chole Aāye
Jhun Jhun Jhun Jhun
Jhun Jhun Jhun"

The cast was as follows :

Macbeth	...	Girish Chandra Ghose
Duncan	...	Pandit Haribhuson Bhattacharya
Malcolm	...	Surendra Nath Ghose (Dani Babu)
Donalbain	...	Nikhilendra Krishna Deb
Banquo	...	Kumud Nath Sarkar
Macduff & Hecate	..	Aghore Pathok

Lennox	...	Binode Shome
Ross	...	Krishanlal Chakraburty
Angus	...	Anukul Batabyal
Caithness	...	Chuni Lal Deb
Bleeding soldier and second murderer		Do
Fleance	...	Kusum Kumari
Siward	..	Thakurdas Chatterjee
Lady Macbeth	...	Tincowrie Dasi
Lady Macduff	...	Promoda Sundari
Music Master	...	Prof. Debkanta Bagchi

We have to pause here a little to discuss about the representation of hero's part. It was not an easy task and the most well-known actors of the world—Garrick, Kemble, Kean, Irving and others appeared in the role before Girish,* but none could approach the first, that is, the great Garrick. Garrick was masterly in his performance, Kemble brilliant in delivery of dialogue but Kean not so successful in that part as he was in an Iago, a Shylock or a Richard III or a Sir Giles Overreach. Sir Henry Irving, too, who appeared as Macbeth shortly before, (Dec. 1888) was scarcely a success although he presented a fairly consistent figure of the hero 'who was swayed as much by his sense of subjection to the supernatural as by his wife's ambition.' Thus when the educated people were obsessed with the particular conception of Macbeth and at a time when Sir Henry was carrying the audience with his Henry VIII, Lear

* Sir Beerbhom Tree took the part long after.

and Becket (1893), in England, for Bengali Girish to appear in that extremly difficult role of Garrick, Kean and Kemble was rather considered an audacious attempt. The question however is --how was his acting appreciated by the *Nil-admirori* Angle Iindian publicists ? "Friend of India" observed—"The performance of Macbeth marks an epoch in the annals of the Native Stage." *The Englishman* too, a paper once associated with Stoqueler, Parker and Hume and always noted for critisism of plays 'at home' but caustic towards every thing Indian, thus observes :—

> "The Second performance of *Macbeth* was shown before a large audience including several European gentlemen. Babu Girish Chandra Ghose, the manager, played the part of Macbeth and the play as a whole was well-rendered. A Bengali Thane of Cawdor is a living suggestion of incongruity but the reality is an 'astonishing' reproduction of the standard convention of the English stage." 8th February 1893.

This represents the view of the European community about the performance of *Macbeth*, but we should give an idea of the genuine Bengali feelings too, from an issue of the *Hindu Patriot*, then leader of public opinion of the country :—

> "The representation of *Macbeth* in the Minerva Theatre on Saturday last as the opening piece, marks a new departure in the dramatic history of Bengal. The novelty of the representation,

as well as the excellence of the general get-up, had attracted a large audience which turned out to be an appreciative one. *Babu Girish Chandra Ghose, the father of the modern stage of Bengal,* as he may be rightly called, had the whole of the work under his personal supervision, commencing with the translation of the master-piece and including the scenery and dresses which were as correct and effective as might be desired. The success became, therefore, a foregone conclusion, when Babu Girish Chandra took the leading character. The part of Lady Macbeth is always one of great difficulty, even in the hands of accomplished actresses, and it is not much of surprise if it was not so well done as might have been desired. But as time wears on, better results may be expected. The other actors sustained their parts very well and the witch-scene was full of mystic terrors that impressed themselves deeply upon the audience. It is difficult to predict whether translations of Shakespearean master-pieces will be favourably received as a rule. If this does not turn out to be the case, Macbeth bids fair to prove an exception. The pavilion has been built and fitted up at enormous cost and the best dramatic talent of the city has been engaged."

The easeful yet elegant and masterly translation of *Macbeth* by Girish reads like an original independent Bengali drama and it might have easily deluded any one ignorant of English into this belief,

if English names of the dramatic persons were changed into Indian names. The acting of Macbeth's difficult part by Girish left nothing further to be desired. His accents and gestures, his expressions and deportment so fathfully represented the great complex tragic character, that even the carping Europeans had nothing but unstinted praise for his superb acting in some ef the most difficult scenes e.g. the ghost scene, the soliloquy, when the airy-dagger marshalls the way, with Macbeth following it, and in the last great scene when he fell fighting bravely against Malcolm and Macduff. Every one was full of admiration for Girish. Of course he deserved all the praise he got, nay even more. But in this undertaking he was very ably supported by Babu Ardhendu Sekhar who appeared in five different characters as the first witch, porter, old gentleman, first murderer and doctor, and in each of them having something original to present without giving the least sign that one person was in so many roles, Dani Babu as Malcolm, Chuni Babu in three roles, Promoda Sundari as Lady Macduff and last not the least Tincowrie Dāsi as Lady Macbeth.

The part of lady Macbeth is also a highly difficult one. Even Mrs. Siddens, Sara Barnard and Ellen Terry felt their histrionic talents very much strained. Besides as to the conceptions of these illustrious actresses of Lady Macbeth's part, each differed from that of the other in a considerable

degree. Siddon's Lady Macbeth was an ambitious woman, while that of the Divine Sara was that of a loving and devoted wife. Ellen Terry's was on the other hand that of a fascinating woman whose feminine charm (rather than masculine power) persuaded Macbeth against his will. Tincowrie, a half-literate Bengali actress, at that time little known, being however trained by Girish acquitted herself rather admirably on the whole. She had not till then attained that celebrity which would entitle her to this classical part but on account of her stature, Siddons-like impressive appearance, as the "Indian Nation" put it, and for her resonant, metallic voice, as Girish called it, Tincowrie was selected for this part, which Promoda had failed to represent.

To mention one or two petty incidents—Promoda Sundari who had been at first given the part, became so jealous of the new actress at her success that she not only put her rival into severe indignities, but from the second night also left the stage in a huff. Now the success of Macbeth both as a literary piece and a play on the stage raised Girish so high in public estimation that not to speak of the Indians, many European gentlemen as we mentioned before began to entertain very high opinion about his dramatic talants. Mr. F. H. Skrine's (of the I. C. S. and then the Commissioner of the Chittagong Division) proposal for some mark

of honour for Girish met with a refusal, bringing only an exclamation of great regret from him—

"How little does the world know of its greatest men !"

Sir Gurudas Banerjee then vice chanceller of the Calcutta University and a Judge of the Calcutta High Court, was a class-mate of Girish during the the school-boy period. He was a man of spotless character and was held in high esteem by all who knew, saw or heard of him. He had never before witnessed a performance on the stage, but now he too was attracted to see the performance of Macbeth in Bengali, which he had considered before, an impossibility. He was however beside himself with joy and justly remarked :—

> "To translate the inimitable language of Shakespeare is a task of no ordinary difficulty, but Babu Girish Chandra Ghose has performed that task very creditably on the whole, and his translation is in many respects quite worthy of the original."

Mr. N. N. Ghose, the famous educationist and publicist whose knowledge of English was the admiration of educated Englishmen, observed that Girish's translation was better than even the French translation of that famous tragedy.

Although on the opening night, great enthusiasm was observed, Girish after the fall of curtain in

the second Act rightly observed "such books can not be accepted by the public. There are no songs and dances and ordinary people can not understand the play." For some nights, of course, houses were packed up, but the sales began to decline from Rs. 2200/- and after ten performances only, the play was put aside.

II

Macbeth was followed by *Mukulmunjara* another drama of great finish, and both the dramas of the newly-started "Minerva" were staged on consecutive days, leaving nothing undone by the management to cater to the taste of the enthusiastic audience that nightly crowded the auditorium. *Mukulmunjara* was a fitting sequel to the Bengali translation of Macbeth. It was staged on the boards of the Minerva on the 4th February 1893,* and continued at a stretch for fourteen nights. It depicts a story of love and intrigue, the object being apparently to show how love acts as a stimulant to the intellect (Mukul Munjarita, budding of the blossoms), bringing into action faculties hitherto

* Thus wrote Girish in handbills on the first night of performance—"Sheer anxiety to appear before the public with new books by way of variety compels me to substitute *Mukulmunjara* for *Mackbeth* on Sunday, not withstanding the favourable reception of the latter.

G. C. Ghose, Manager.

lying dormant. The piece was well represented and the cast was distributed as follows :—

Mukul	...	Dani Babu
Chandradhwaja	...	Chuni Babu (Jubaraj)
Mantrī	...	Kumudnath Sarkar
Kṣitīdhar	...	Nikhilendra Krishna
Rājā Jayadhwaja	...	Haribhusan Bhattacharyya
Baruṇ Chānd	...	Ardhendu Sekhar
Bhajanrām	...	Binode B. Shome (Pada Babu)
Achyutānanda	...	Aghore Pathok
Sushen	...	Nilmoni Ghose
Tārā	...	Tincowrie
Munjarā	...	Kusum Kumari
Chāmelī	...	Harimati (Biḍal).

About the performance we can not resist the temptation of quoting the observations of the *Indian Mirror* on this point :

"The first representation of *Mukul Munjara* at the Minerva Theatre on Sunday last was attended by as large an audience and gone through with as much credit to all concerned as the opening performance of Macbeth was a week ago. The new comedy is the outcome of the imaginative brain of Babu Girish Chandra Ghose, and represents the actions of a couple of heroes and a couple of heroines, the two former being Mukul and Chandradhwaja respectively and the two latter, Tara and Munjara respectively the daughters of the Kings of Pāndianā and Karowali. The character of Mukul was rendered in a style that left little to be desired, the

personator being keenly alive to the truth of the trite (though little followed) saying— "Those who would make us feel, must feel themselves." Tara who feigned dumbness out of sympathy for her brother, created sufficient interest in the character by the significance of her sacrificing silence. Munjara was impersonated by a growing girl, who did credit to her trainer. Chāmeli, her companion, charmed the audience with her songs, the musical composition of which, by the way, appeared to be somewhat below her acknowledged attainments. The role of the opium-eating Barun Chand, who at the bidding of the scheming Sushen managed to pass muster as the son of the King of Pāndianā, was taken up by a veteran comedian whose appearance on the stage on each occasion was the signal for vociferous laughter. In the last scene where he bound Sushen with the silken ties of love, which in his case were represented by a strong cord of coir placed round the villain's neck, he simply *out-dīd himself in the comic cast.* The dialogues between brother and sister, about their mutual objects of love, bristled with feelings, though conversation, generally speaking, seemed somewhat shocking to Indian ideas of domestic propriety. The personations, taken all round, justified the selections made of them to fill the different parts and they well succeeded in interpreting the niceties of thought and the varieties of action which characterise this entertaining production."

III

What, however, proved to be an irresistible success was a melo-drama called *Ābu Hossain* (or Mushroom Emperor) staged on the 25th March 1893. It had been composed along with *Mukul Munjarā* sometime before, for the Star Theatre but was rejected by it. But how warmly were these dramas received from the Minerva Stage, may be gathered from their successive runs and the plaudits they received from the general audience. *Ābu Hossain* was a brilliant piece. Its racy wit, light dramatic touches and above all its charming songs and captivating dances made the audience frantic with joy.

It came like a great relief to the play-goers, after the tension of tragic emotions induced by Macbeth. As Ābu Hussain, Mustafi Saheb was at his best as a consummate comic actor and Harimati (Biḍal) in her part of Roshena received unrestrained applause for her songs.

Thakur Das Chatterjee appeared as Emperor *Harun Al-rashid* while Tincowrie as Dāi (Nurse) and the dancing-master Ranu Babu as Moshur captivated the whole house by their charming duets and dancings.

This duet-scene was enthusiastically received with thundering applause and awakened a desire for more such duets. *Abu Hossain* may thus fairly be called as the starting point of Bengali comic operas.

From this time there was an ever-increasing demand for racy comedies and for music and dancing, which later dramatists tried to satisfy by their exuberant extravaganzas amongst which Rajkrishna Roy's *Layla Majnoo* and Khirode Babu's "*Āli Bābā* deserve special mention. The play of *Ābu Hossain* continued for nights and fetched considerable money to the proprietor, helping him to clear a large portion of his debts. Indeed the play was so popular that we can not help quoting here the opinion of the *Indian Mirror*, 4th April 1893 after the end of second performance :—

> "The make-up of the characters was beyond all cavil and the scenery specially the illuminated street represented a triumph of the painter's skill. The hero was impersonated by a *famous fellow of infinite jest* who did ample justice to the role, assigned to him. Some of Roshena's songs shed showers of liquid liquorice. The charming duet in the last scene was an admirable achievement in dance and song that formed one of the events of the evening. In his combined capacity of manager and author, Girish Chandra has well succeeded in giving the light production a delightful turn."

The *Hindu Patriot* also made the following observations :

> "*Ābu-Hossain* was received well. The comic element is supreme and plot is delightful. Vocal music was continued to an unlimited extent and

the scenic arrangements which are a speciality with the well-known artist and decorator Babu Dharmodas Soor are all that could be desired. The piece drew a large and appreciative audience on Saturday last and passed off without a hitch. It will prove a great relief to play-goers after the tension of fealing induced by Macbeth."

IV

On the 23rd May 1893, Girish Chandra revived the mythological drama of *Dakṣajajña* which had met with high appreciation when Gurumukh Roy's 'Star' opened with it. Girish Chandra had been there in the leading role with his disciples Amrita Lal Mitra and Binodini as Mahādev and Śatī respectively. Here, too, at the Minerva he took up his original role with Dani Babu and Bhuson Kumari as Mahādev and Śatī. Other parts were represented as follows :—

Tapaswinī	...	Tincowrie
Prasūtī	...	Basanta
Nandi	...	Aghore Pathok
Bhiṛngī.	...	Pada Babu

The following observations of the *Indian Mirror* will give a true picture of the representation at the Minerva given before a packed house :—

"The dignified contour of Dakṣa was capitally reproduced by Babu Girish Chandra Ghose who from the fact of being the author of the piece

was singularly well-justified to reflect the exact spirit of the role. His impresonation was, to apply the remarks of Victor Hugo on Lamaitre's Ruy Blass—"not a transformation, but a transfiguration." Next in importance in the cast is Mahadev, that unique unification in asceticism and affection. This character was represented by a budding genius whose placid presence set off the vehemence of his feelings. The other figures in the play would have done very well indeed if they had not laboured under, what was undoubtedly to them, a serious disadvantage, which penny candles must suffer in the presence of incandescent lamps."

V

But to crown all, the play which was the most popular at the time was Girish Chandra's mythological piece *Janā* staged on December 23, 1893. It depicts how Arjuna the third Pāndava was met by the young prince of Māheswamoti—Queen Jana's son Provira—who died fighting bravely with him (Arjuna) instead of submitting meekly to his imperious demands. *Janā* is a high-class drama* and its merits we would better have our litterateurs to describe. As a play, however, on the stage it not only appeals considerably to the youth but also to the motherhood of India. It thus stands above the

* The idea was taken from a few lines of Aswamedha-parba (Kasiram Das'a Mahabharata) as also from the poem of Madhusudon's *Jana to Niladhwaja*.

pure mythological pieces. Since the actress, who acted as Lady Macbeth, impersonated Janā now, the dramatist in delineating the heroine Janā, did not lose sight of the previous character altogether.

Jana incites her son to the battle-field, scolds the daughter-in-law for her weak fears that overpower her and taunts the husband for submitting to the enemy as a slave, and if truth be told she is more majestic than even Shakespeare's Volumnia (*Coriolanus*) and more determined and dignified than Queen Margaret (*Richard III*).

Indeed Janā's upbraiding of Madan Manjuri, her daughter-in-law, for the latter's failure to encourage her husband Provira, reminds us of Volumnia charging her daughter-in-law Virgilia* for her fears.

Janā's leading the son to the battle-field and doing everything possible may also be compared with Volumnia's dignified remonstrance with the son, when the latter joined the enemy general Aufidius against country's interests, but Janā's heroic resolve and taunting expressions when her husband meekly

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* Virgilia—"His bloody brow ! O Jupiter ! no blood.

Volumnia—Away, you fool ! it more becomes a man
Than gilt his trophy. The breasts of Hecuba
When she did suckle Hector, looked not lovelier
Than Hector's forehead, when it spit forth blood,
At Grecian swords contemning—"

submitted to the enemy, have no parallel. It is indeed a rare treasure and no literature of any country has so masterfully depicted a mother as Girish has done in *Janā*.

Miss Tincowri represented the part to a finish and Provira (Prince) too, was very ably done by Dani Babu, who was known amongst the people as "Young G. C." for his skilful acting. Mr Mustafi's Vidushaka too was appreciated highly and the remaining cast was as follows :—

Nīladhwaja	...	Hari Bhusan Bhattacharyya
Gaṅgārakṣak	...	Pada Babu, Gobordhone Babu
Kṛṣṇa	...	Rānu Babu
Mahādev and Bhīm	...	Thakurdas Chatterji
Bṛṣaketu	...	Kristo Lal Chatterji
Madan Mañjurī	...	Bhusan Kumari
Nāyikā	...	Bhaba Tarini
Brāhmonī and Gaṅgā	...	Harimoti (Gulphan Hari).

The character of Viduṣaka illustrates the deep philosophy of 'Faith' which alone works salvation and is far above the meaningless rituals and dogmas. Ostensibly the character is a comic one, but there is a deep seriousness inside, and Mr. Mustafi though did well in acting the lighter side, failed however in depth. After he had left for the Emerald Theatre four nights later, Girish Chandra himself appeared in the role and then the proper significance revealed itself to the people. *Janā* had a continued run for 40 nights, and used to be sportingly called as

"The Government Promissory Note" for the management.* Now about Girish's rendering of the part, thus does the *Hindu Patriot* observe :

> "*Janā* was repeated last Saturday before an overflowing house. The character of Viduṣaka was for the first time sustained by Girish Chandra himself and he gave evident proofs of his abilities as a good comic character. He kept the house in capital humour and contributed largely to the success of the play."

Actual performance of the part by Girish was, however, far superior to the comment above.

In the present volume we would rather refrain from going into the details about farces and operas staged about the time 1894 (*Saptamite Bisarjjan, Baḍadiner Bokśis, Hirār Phool, Swapner Phool, Sabhyatār Pāṇḍā* or *Phoṇīrmoṇi*), but we would like to mention about another devotional drama staged on 18th May 1895 and that was *Karameti Bāī* about which the great journalist and litterateur Mr. N. N. Ghose of the *Indian Nation* observes as follows in his paper (Vide 15th July 1895) :—

> "*Karameti Bāī* is the latest production of Babu Girish Chandra Ghose. The interest of the book lies in that it is pre-eminently a national drama—a drama embodying the highest religious instincts and aspirations of the national drama of light and faith. Babu Girish Chandra Ghose was the first, we believe, to hit at the

* Ābu Hossain, too, was so called.

truth that nothing so moves the national mind as religion, and to work thereupon in construcing all the great plays excepting *Profulla* and *Hārānidhī* which have for their theme domestic incidents. In *Karameti Bāī*, he has selected the highest phase of Vaiṣṇava faith who from her child-hood felt the rays of a higher and brighter world flitting around her and became unmindful of her environments. She was married; Aloke her husband who was drawn into the cricle of Tānṭriks, bestowed no thought upon her, till the idea of seducing a woman led him to make the experiment on his own wife. He designed himself as a servant and came to stay in the house of his father-in-law. To his utter amazement he found his wife unlike any one that he had seen of her kind. A halo of purity seemed to play round her which kept him, vicious as he was, at arm's length. "Shyam" "Shyam" she cried aloud now and then and followed up the word with what was quite a mystery to the gross mind of Aloke. For the first time he received a check in his evil course. He became firmly attached to his wife, admired her as he did no one else and longed to live a better and purer life. Karameti Bai was not of this world—she was in search of her spiritual Lord. With failures, however, came the desire to use force. He seized her, took her away and locked her in a room of his own. But she got through the open window and was miraculously removed. Then the desire to regain her changed into a desire to please her—the first step

to self-dedication, through the influence of some Fakirs whom he happened to meet in the course of his rambles. He will find out "Shyam" and unite her with him. But nowhere was Shyam to be had. A second interview with the Fakirs taught him the great lesson of extinguishing all desires. Karameti Bai after passing through diverse experience had the bliss of being ushered into the presence of Radhakṛṣṇa and having her place in the group of their fair attendants (Golok-Baṣinīs). Aloke was quite unaffected at the scene which he happened to witness. This is an outline of the plot of the play the bare hint of which the writer obtained from a Vaiṣṇava writing *Vaktamāl*. A number of finely composed songs adds to the charm of the play.

The part of the heroine was taken by Tincowrie, and those of Aloke and Tukra by Dani Babu and Akshoy Chakrabarty respectively and supported by others, as follows :—

Paraśurām (Karameti's father)	... Gobordhan Banerjee
Āgambāgīś	.. Haribhushan Babu
Fakirs	... Nilmoni Ghose, Pathak & Nibaran Babu
Kṛṣṇa	... Kusum Kumari
Rājā	... Khagen Sarkar
Mantrī	... Bama Charan Sen
Rādhikā	... Bhusan Kumari
Kirtikā	... Jagat Tarini
Ambicā	... Gulphau Hari

In *Karameti Bāi* the management represented an elaborate scenic device—first, showing Karameti suffering from hunger and exhaustion going on a journey on foot towards Brindaban in search of Shyam, which was next transformed into that of the Kunjaban of Brindaban, with Radha and Sahacharies (Gopinīs) singing with her.

Tincowrie got a set back in the representation of this part—she also began to think much of herself as a heroine. After a few nights she absented herself when *Karameti* was being staged. Tarasundari, however, came to Girish's help and saved him for the night, from the awkward position he was put into.

VII

After the performance of *Karameti Baī*, Girish Chandra put in rehearsals his favourite social drama *Profulla*. It was here that he appeared for the first time in the inimitable role of Jogesh, the hero. The rehearsals at the Minerva incited his disciples, Amrita Lal also, to run *Profulla* at the Star theatre for the second time.

"Star" had by this time retrieved from its former reverses and was at that time competing with the Minerva with *Chandra Śekhar*, a play dramatised from Bankim's novel of its name. Now both the theatres strove hard to vie with each other and *Profulla* was staged on both of them from the

13th July 1895 onwards. The following poem appeared in the advertising notices for the *Star Theatre* :—

' To wake the soul by tender strokes of art,
To raise the genius and to mend the heart,
Thou freely judge the sins that shall ensue ;
But as with freedom judge with candour too
We would not lose through prejudice this cause,
Nor would obtain precarious applause
Impartial censure we request from all
Prepared by just decrees to stand or fall,"

Amritalals (Mitter and Bose) further put a couplet from the Bengali *Mahābhārata* in their notices as an apologium—"Ṭomāri Śikṣita Vidyā Dekhābo Ṭomāre"—we shall show you the very art, you taught us once. But unlike Drona of the Mahābhārata fame, the Guru (Girish) here came out triumphant...The "Star" played till the 17th August, 1895, after which they had to retire from the list, leaving the Minerva to continue *Profulla* for a month more with signal success and increased reputation. Girish was Jogesh personified and his pupil, Amrita Mitter, even with his gifted voice, was no match for him.

Besides Amritalal many an actor have appeared as Jogeś—Probodh Ghosh (City) Ardhendu Shekhar (Minerva), Dani Babu (Unique, Monomohon and Star), Amar Dutta (Star), and others, but none could approach Girish, especially in the expression of highly delicate and complex emotions,

as none could approach Garrick in Macbeth or Lear. The comparative casts are given below :

Star	Character	Minerva
Amrita Mitra	Jogeś -	Girish Ghose
Amrita Lal Bose (Original)	Rameś -	Chunilal Dev
Kashi Chatterjee	Sureś -	Dani Babu
	Shibnāth -	Nikhilendrakrishna Dev
	Jādab -	Neḍi (Sorojini)
Akshoy Kali Koer	Vajahari -	Binode Behari shome
Jibon Sen	Kāṅgāli -	Syam Kundo (Original)
Upendra Mittra	Madandādā	Gobardhan Banerjee
Mahendra Choudhury (Original)	Pitāmbar -	Nilmoni Ghosh
	Inspector -	Kumud Sarker
Ramtaran Sanynl (Original)	Magistrate	Manik Babu
Gangamoni ...	Umāsundarī	Khetromoni (the most powerful actress)
Promoda ...	Jñānadā -	Kusumkumari (as Tinkowri left)
Nagendrabala ...	Profulla -	Bhushankumari (original of the Star)
Tunnamoni (Original)	Jogomoni -	Jagat Tarini (one of the first four actresses in Bengal).
Nari Sundari ...	Mātālinī -	Sarat

About the representation of the play in both the theatres we would better quote *Indian Mirror*, Thursday 1st August, 1895 :—

The concurrent representation of *Profulla* at the Star and the Minerva Theatre during the last three weeks has created quite a stir among the

patrons of the Bengali drama, * The Star company has produced a revival with the advantageous support of the original impersonations of Jogesh, Ramesh, Suresh, Pitambar, Umasundari and Jaga while the Minerva Theatre has presented, so far as this institution is concerned, a new piece with, however, the compensating advantage of having on its staff the heroine and Kangali Charan of the original cast and of getting the author himself to appear in the towering role of Jogesh. Thus situated the performances stand on their trial before the public who occupy the Jury box. Unless they are disposed to return a perverse verdict, we think without risking a prosecution for contempt of the court, the Jurors are likely to deliver their opinion somewhat as follows .—The character of Ramesh received the fullest possible justice at the Star, the subtle mischievousness of the character being worked out in all its details, while the Ramesh of the Minerva comes in dangerous proximity of the common place. Suresh does capitally well in the lighter scenes and is effectingly natural in the court-scene when he takes leave of his friend, but he falls short of what is required of him in the jail. In this last incident he is distinctly distanced by his competitor at the Minerva, not a word of whom misses Fire. The actor who essays the *role* of Kāngālichuran at the Star, may be told that it is not essential to the success of the part that he should imitate the voice of the original who stimulates the

tone with so much innate ease. Jaga and Pitambar at the Star appear to better advantage than their name-sakes at the other place. The new Umasundari has the advantage of the true tragic ring in her voice, though her rival does not yield a whit to her in general intelligence. The old Profulla lives quite up to her reputation while the new shows the stuff that is in her in the penultimate scene of the last act in which she makes an impassioned appeal to Madan Ghosh and in which she is considered as surpassing the original out and away. So far as regards the old versus the new, barring Jogesh who is dealt with further down. In reference to the case of the new versus new, the Shibnath of the Minerva yields the palm to him of the Star. The two Madans make tie, and so do the two Vajaharis. Between the two Jadavs there is not much to choose, unless it be that the one at the Minerva draws more sympathy from the spectators by the fact of his being able to show the blister plasters in the abdomen in the excruciatingly torturous scene. The Jnanda at the Minerva has the advantage of being blessed with a slim figure which helps the spectators sensibly in realizing the extent of her privations prior to her death in the street though her competitor at the Star gives ample proof of her experience.

So far, however, the advantages and disadvantages almost balance each other. Now comes the question of the claims of the two Jogeshes to superiority. The character of Jogesh is the

pivot on which the whole mechanism of the play moves and the weight of its correct impersonation is therefore calculated to turn the scales one way or the other. Here is a case of Greek meeting Greek. It would however be no discredit to the original Jogesh, if he owns his inferiority to the new nor would, we believe, the latter take it as anything but a matter of self-gratulation if he is beaten by the former whom he trained to the part some years ago. The former has the gift of a clear, incisive voice and a roundness of delivery while the latter has the advantage of being the author of the piece (not necessarily an advantage in the case of all the authors) and of being possessed with the intuitive skill of probing into the depths of human thought and giving it feeling expression. The former voices the thunder, while the latter emits the lightning of the gloomy atmosphere of the character's life. It would be difficult to pronounce an opinion on the "on the whole." The infallible practical test of the box-office as yet affords no help, for both the houses are crammed to their utmost capacity and both of them ring with the vociferous plaudits of the enchanted audience. Whichever way the result may take, after the first fever of the excitement is over, the competition is calculated to develop the critical faculties of the play-goers and foster a spirit of healthy emulation between two of prominent Bengali Theatres of Calcutta.

This contest of Girish and Amritalal raminds us

of that between Garrick and Barry in the middle of the eighteenth century in London in the representation of the part of King Lear. Sometime before in the role of Romeo 'Barry was as much superior to Garrick as York Minister is to a Methodist Chapel.' But now came a time when King Lear was advertised in both the theatres. Being less appreciated than his disciple in Romeo, Garrick who had sometime ago trained Barry to the part of Lear, now conceived this part of Lear in such masterly manner with depth of pathos with the occasional rise and fall of his voice, that when he uttered,—

"That she may feel how sharper than a serpent's teeth it is to have a thankless child" (Here sharper was uttered in a mild tone, and in next breath in a sharp thrilling voice), and also when he charged the elements—

'I tax not you, you elements with unkindness, I never gave you kingdom, called you children, you owe me no subscription"

The contrast was keenly felt and Garrick carried off the palm. The following doggerels recorded the success and superiority of the master-artist in-comparison with that of his pupil-rival—

"The town has found out different ways
To praise its different Lears
To Barry it gives loud huzzas
To Garrick only tears.

"A King, eye, every inch a king
Such Barry doth appear:
But Garrick's quite another thing
He's every inch King Lear."

The other casts in which Girish appeared at the Minerva were chiefly in the dual roles of Rām and Meghnād in the *Meghnād Badha* specially staged on the 25th August 1895 and on the following week, and that of Clive in the *Battle of Plassy* on the 30th November. In this connection it may be mentioned that Khetromoni who had come here from the Emarald Theatre, now in the role of Nṛmuṇḍamālinī in the former drama was matched with advantage to Girish's Rām and to Babu Mahendra Lal Bose as Lakṣmaṇ. Bose was also at his best.

But alas! While the sun of Girish Chandra's dramatic life was at the meridian, and the Bengali stage grew to be an educational institution, besides being a mere place of innocent entertainments, differences, however, began to occur between the proprietor and the manager. Inspite of the earnest attempt of Girish Chandra to free the theatre from its liabilities, he could not make much headway owing to the spenthrift habits of Nāgendra Babu, and when the latter used to draw money without Girish's knowledge and with no account, in the interest of the theatre itself, Girish was then obliged to take charge of the cash in his own hands as manager.

Feelings became strained and when Girish saw that the proprietor was looking for all opportunity to get rid of him, as a self-respecting gentleman, he had to take leave of the Minerva Theatre. With his resignation the condition of the Minerva was like that of a boat without its helmsan in troubled waters. Girish left about March 1896, and the conditlon of the Minerva daily grew from bad to worse till it sank into insignificance as a dramatic house. But how years after (during the period 1905—1911), it returned to a greater position again than before under Girish's care and training we shall see in the next volume.

One thing needs mention here Babu Devendra Nath Bose, a cousin of Girish, was the assistant Manager of the Minerva Theatre. He was a highly cultured man and was the author of *Bejāya Āwāz.*

Later he left for Cossimbazar to act as Private Secretary to Maharaja Sir Manindra Chandra Nandi who was once a class-mate and intimate friend of his before.

Chapter V

AT THE STAR THEATRE. (Again)

No sooner Girish left Minerva Theatre than his disciples—the proprietors of the Star Theatre—greeted him again as the master and the Dramatic director. They were at this time feeling sore want of dramas and secured Girish's services at a monthly honorarium of Rs. 350. This time, too, Girish was not long in his stay here, but before we deal with his activities for the period, however short it was, we shall digress a little from him in describing how the Star was faring during his absence.

As we mentioned the name of the poet and dramatist Raj Krishna Roy, he presented the following dramas *Naramedh Jajña* and *Laylā Majnoo* in 1891, *Bonobīr* and *Ṛṣyaśṛṅga* in 1892 *Benejir Badarmooney* in 1893. Babu Amrita Bose also entertained the audience with his farces *Rājā Bāhādur*, *Kālāpāṇī* and *Ekākār* and dramas *Bejoy Basanta*, *Chandra Śekhar* and *Rājsinga.* The last two were merely the dramatised versions of Bankim Chandra's novels. Rajkrishna Babu's drama were rather of mediocre merits and *Laylā Majnoo* was more or less an imitation of *Ābu Hossain* with more songs and dancings.

Mere comic pieces of Amritalal and commonplace dramas of Rajkrishna could not keep up the Star for a long time, specially at a time when under its very nose Girish was creating a new epoch in the dramatic world in the Minerva Theatre. What with comic farces and mediocre dramas Star company continued with its established reputation no doubt, but dearth of dramas was very deeply felt. In the meantime Rajkrishna Babu too died and the Star Company would have fared very badly had not the dramatised version of *Chandra Śekhar* come out of the pen of Babu Amritalal Bose to their great luck. *Chandra Śekhar* was a very popular novel of Bankim Chandra, the literary dictator of Bengal who died five months ago in the meridian of his glory. His sad demise roused popular sympathy and veneration for his great works. This fact contributed greatly to the success and popularity of the drama. Besides, some impressing scenes, good acting specially of Chandra Śekhar and Śaibalinī and songs of Dalanī created a sensation.

About the success of the performance, we would better quote the remarks of the *Statesman* of September 20, 1894—

> "The Second performance of Bankim's *Chandra-Śekhar* on Saturday last was very successful. The perfect mounting, appropriate costumes and the powerful cast, together with the ex-

cellence and popularity of the work on which the play is founded combined to lend special interest to the performance. The play, though long, did not for a single moment fail to interest the large audience present, which evinced their appreciation by loud cheers. Apart from the good scenery, the correct rendering of the principal parts contributed chiefly to the success of the play *Chandra Śekhar* the type of the Bengali Pandit of the last century was quite true to life. In the scene where his tranquil soul was disturbed by the kidnapping of his young wife, he[1] simply excelled himself, veteran as he is. Śaibalinī[2] the central character of the play could not have found a better personater. Her ravings in the comic scene had a powerful effect on the house. Protap[3] did very well in the bed-room scene and in the scene where he swam in company with Saibalini in the moon-lit water of the Ganges. The actress who played Sundari[4] elicited warm approval by her rendering of the part. The Nawab[5] Mirkashim maintained himself throughout like a Nawab. Daloni[6] was excellent. Her devotion to her husband and the scene with her brother Gurgan who was betraying her long were effective bits of acting while her songs were much admired. Gurgan[7] who was trying to kick down the ladder by which he had ascended

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1. Amrita Mitra. 2. Tarasundari. 3. Akshoy Kali Koer. 4. Nagendrabala. 5. Mohendra Choudhury. 6. Narisundari. 7. Suren Mitra.

from a very humble position acquitted himself most creditably. The four Englishmen were appropriately dressed according to the fashion in vogue in the latter part of the last century and with one exception they found capable interpreters. Lawrence Foster[1] seemed however to be a novice but a little more familiarity with the stage would enable him to do greater justice in the part. The faithful servant[2] acted in a manner which left nothing to be desired. Of the new characters into the play Srinath[3] and Biswas[4] deserve special mention. In conclusion much may be said in praise of the dramatist. The book had hitherto been looked upon as "in-capable of being dramatised," but he has skilfully overcome all difficulties.'

Chandra Śekhor could not however be the only dramatic asset to run a theatre, and the competition with Girish and his party on the performances of *Profulla* about a year after met with what result has been stated before. Besides *Rajsiṅa* too did not attract a good audience. Thus with all their success, if success realy could there be, after Girish left, they had still reasons for submission to their master and rightly did they now come forward to pay regards due to him.

Girish was at the Star over a year and wrote here two high class dramas *Kālā-pāhāḍ* and *Māyābaśān*

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1. Ramlal Banerjee. 2. Poran Seal. 3. Upendra Mitra. 4. Ghonosyam Babu.

and opera *Parasya Prosun* (flower of Persia) within the course of over a year. The dramatic piece *Hirak Jubilee* was also composed here. We shall now give a short description of the two dramas only.

Kālāpāhār though refers to historical incidents, is a drama of deep religious tone. We have given before some idea of the doubts and scepticism which perplexed Girish's mind for over 14 years of his life in youth and how he regained the equilibrium of his mind under the benign influence of Ramkrishna Dev in 1884. In this drama Chintāmoni represents the Guru, Kālāpāhār those who are perplexed with doubts, and Leto a devotee like the dramatist himself, as he turned to be under Ramkrishna's influence. One can thus look to both the phases of his life—one of doubt and another of faith. The Guru and his disciple were represented in the performance by the father and son—Girish and Dani Babu to a finish, and Kālāpāhār by Amrita Mitra. The other characters were thus represented—

Mukunda Deb	...	Akshoy Kali Koar
Vireswar	...	Upendra Mitra
Salimon	...	Surendra Mitra (Fattai)
Dulal	...	Ashibhuson Bose (Mr. Amrita Basu's son)
Jail Dārogā	...	Natobar Chowdhury
Farab Khān	...	Jivon Krishna Sen
Chañchalā	...	Promoda Sundari
Imān	...	Nagendrabala

Dolenā	...	Nari Sundari
Muralā	...	Gangamoni.

Although the drama is a highly philosophical one, people appreciated the play very much and Mr, R. C. Dutt I.C.S., C.I.E., the great novelist highly praised it.

The drama was staged on Dec. 26, 1896.

The next drama *Māyābasān*, staged on 18th Dec. 1897, describes how bitter litigations provoked selfish nephews to turn their uncle mad and that nothing is impossible with a class of unscrupulous lawyers. It also deals with the lofty spiritual culture of self-realisation, and resignation to God (*i.e.* Ātma-Jñān). Further it satirised the Congress of that time, when agitation was considered as the only panacea of all political evils, but at the same time, it advocated a programme of constructive work in the mouth of Kalikinkar for arbitration, boycott of articles of luxury and, Swadeshi (cloth, salt and other industries). Thus Girish was far ahead of the political leaders in recommending Swadeshi in preference to foreign articles. The Managers of the theatre however did not place too much faith on the teachings and betrayed an indifference which cut Girish to the quick. He used to say :—

"You could not catch the spirit of *Māyābasān* during my life-time, thus you set back the book for more than half a century. Every body will hereafter interpret the book according to his own ideas".

The cast* was brilliant and the performance successful.

Girish now himself attained the position as a religious teacher and all the philosophical expressions in his mouth both from drama as also in personal conversation expressed the highest spiritual truths. He used to say and very rightly—

"To you men and women of the stage—I am come as destined by my Guru, since this is no place for better teachers."

Girish Chandra was here nominally till the 15th May 1898, when the theatre had been suspended for about a month and a half, owing to the out-break of Beubonic plague which scared away the people from the town. But sometime before this, Girish ceased to have any interest. The proprietors were not submissive to him. They used to wrongly criticise the above two dramas in an adverse spirit. Sometimes the carriage was not sent to his house to bring him to the theatre. As a self-respecting man, he sat at his house and thus his connection with the Star Theatre automatically ceased and so it did for good. After this also, the Star proprietors—specially Babu Amrita Mitra—tried to have him there as their

* Kālikiṅkar—Girish Ghose, Haladhar—Dani Babu, Gaṇapati—Akshoy Kali Koer, Annapūrṇā—Tarasundari, Bindu—Nogendrabala, Raṅginī—Narisundari.

Guru, but never did he set his foot again on the Star.

What were Girish's activities after this, for the next few years and how after a considerable period during the years 1904—1912 till his death,he again worked for and raised the Minerva Theatre to the highest pinnacle of success when other theatres were thrown into shade, will be dealt with in full in our next volume.

Now the two pieces *Kālāpāhār* and *Māyābasān* have laid down a great truth that now sounds as a truism that *Religious unity* is the only strong soldering element of national unity for India.

In *Kālāpāhār*, "Chintamoni" speaks to "Leto"—

"Poor Leto, you differentiate
Between a God and Allah
There is one God, various people
Call him in various names".

"As water is named in various words.—*Jal*, *Acquā*, *Pāṇi*, so is God, even if to some he is God to others Hari, Allah or Īswara, Jesus or Jehova. It is the narrow-minded only who try to form parties but the true worshippers of God entertain no feeling of difference between their own methods and those of others."

Girish was preaching this principle of *Religious unity* from the stage, that we fight over names, over

differences without any distinction, when Swami Vivekananda was preaching the same thing at the "Parliament of Religions held at Chicago and both of them were echoing the lessons given to them and to all by their common Guru—Ramkrishna Deb—

"As many are ways as
there are views."
"Jata mat tata path."

Now Girish wants to make clear that what is true in the domain of religion is also true in the sphere of politics and nationalism. He deprecates that kind of unity between Hindus and Mohomedans which consists in shaking each others' hands in public meetings, but cherishing feelings of enmity in private life, and in communal interests. Thus in the *Māyābasān* Kalikinkar says :—

"Excepting religious unity
no other unity is possible."

What he means is this :

"Hindus, Mohomedans, Christians and even the Brahmos are divided into various sects. Hindus again are sub-divided into various sub-sects and classes. There is an interminable quarrel between the Śāktas and the Vāiṣṇavas. To one sect the other is damnable. If, however, we all consider that God is one and that we—be we Hindus or Mohomedans, Christians or Jains—are only His

sons, then alone is unity possible, but until that is achieved, there is no hope."

Indeed this only can bring our regeneration and an instance may be quoted in support of Girish's theory of unity.

The Turkish delegation who came to India last year stated in answer to the invitation of a section of the Mohomedan community—"We are Turks first and Mohomedans afterwards." Similarly, if *religious unity* is achieved, we Hindus and Mohomedans would then be in a position plainly to say that we are Indians first, and Hindus and Mohomedans afterwards.

This teaching of Girish about *religious unity* is what India requires most to-day and from this point of view also, Girish has been recognised as a genuine Seer. Truly has the great Deshbandhu C. R. Das honoured the dramatist as *Mahākabi Girish*.

Of the further activities of Girish Chandra, mostly social and national, we shall deal with in the next volume.

Chapter VI

OTHER THEATRES

(I) THE BEENA THEATRE

Sometime after Gopal Seal's Emerald Theatre opened at the Star pavilion, Babu Raj Krishna Roy, a well-known poet and dramatist whose *Prolhād Charitra* created a sensation at the Bengal Theatre, opened the Beena Theatre at 38, Mechhua Bazar Street on the 10th December 1887 with his *Chandra-Hāss*. The innovation he wanted to introduce was to have female parts played by young boys and not by girls. The experiment, however unpractical and chimerical, was all the same applauded by the *Indian Mirror*, well-known for puritanic views in the following words—

> "The most characteristic feature will be the absence of all immoral elements from its constitution. The female parts will be represented by the well-trained youngmen of the eminent grace, loveliness and voice of whom a goodly number has been secured. The whole thing was got up in such a manner as to create a revolution in the theatrical world of Bengal. It is thus entitled to the moral and material support of the people."

He then wanted to stage his own drama *Prolhād Charitra*, but had no suitable artists for the purpose. At this time a band of youths formed themselves into a company *Ārya Nāṭya Samāj* with Babu Akshoy Kali Koer as Secretary, their office being at 28, Serpentine Lane. Raj Krishna Babu secured the co-operation and assistance of the party and staged *Prolhad Charitra* on the 18th December 1887, Raj Krishna Babu and Akshoy Babu appearing in the roles of Hiraṇya Kaśipoo and Śanda respectively and the part of Prolhād was taken by a boy named Sarat Karmoker. About the play which *Mirror* calls brilliant success, we quote here a few lines from its columns:—

> "The author acted Hiraṇya Kaśipoo and played his part admirably and displayed his power of representation to the greatest advantage. He carried the house with him without a single break. All the necessary qualifications of a successful actor he appeared to possess in a great degree. No unnecessary gesture or gesticulation was even seen in his acting. The boy-hero vied with him for the credit of supremacy and he carried it off to the delight of the audience. His sweet and melodious voice and devotional postures and attention produced a charming effect on the audience. He held the whole house breathless over his noble fate throughout. The mother of the hero did contribute not a little to the success of the play. Her piteous solicitude to save the life of her

> blessed child was most admirably rendered. She had the entire sympathy of the audience. As each scene followed the other, the excitement of the audience increased more and more, and at last it reached its highest climax and the audience were enchanted. All credit is due to Babu Raj Kristo Roy."

The theatre, without female artists could not however, meet with any general enthusiasm, and sales did not rise high. Added to this, Raj Krishna Babu had a fall while playing his part and got a leg fractured. Ārya Nāṭya Samāj however continued with some of his dramas,—*Haradhanubhanga*, *Kumār Vikram*, *Haridās Thākur* etc. and obtained some notoriety by staging a new piece *National Congress* from 26th October 1888 when the Bengal Provincial Conference was held at Calcutta. *Sādhārani* and *Navabibhākar* said about this (*vide* 16th Aswin 1295 B.S.).

> "The audience was much gratified to see the acting. Some British statesmen are attributed to have said "You. Hindus, Mussalmans and Parsees, be separated. How can you be independent if you are united." Last of all a well-meaning Englishman came and united them."

After this the Binā Theatre with boys only to play female parts, was closed for good. In December 1888 Mr. U. N. Das (dramatist and Director) who returned by this time from England, staged a piece, *Dādā O Āmi* in this stage under the

name New National, from 8th December 1888. This incited the artists of the Emerald stage too to stage a scurrilous piece in retort *Gādhā O Tumi You and Ass* referring to U. N. Das. It came from the pen of Atul Kumar Mitra and referred probably to the irregular life Mr. Das led in England. This piece was followed by *Sarat Sarojini* on the 16th December and *Sadhobār Ekādaśi* on the 25th, Upendra Babu appearing as Sarat and Neemchánd. Babu Srish Chandra Ghose was the manager and dramatic director here. After this the New National too, was heard of no more.

Raj Krishna Bose at last came to the right condecision. The Ārya Nāṭya Samāj again joined Mr. Roy in right earnest and wanted to take female artists to represent the female characters. Raj Krishna Babu's *Mīrā Bāī*, a devotional drama, was being rehearsed when Babu Akshoy Kali Koer with his co-adjutors Haran Chandra Roy and Narain Chandra Banerjee went to Miss Tincowri's house and engaged her for the theatre on a paltry sum of Rs. 30/- a month only. The songs sung by Tincowri were set into tune by the Prolhād of Binā—Sarat Karmaker. Previous to Tincowri, Kadambini the then premier actress, was giving rehearsals for the part of Mīrā but finding that her voice was not on a par with that of Sarat, she did not like to appear. Tincowri however got the requisite training, but her voice failed on the night of the play.

Her part was however, tolerably fair. Akshoy Babu appeared as Rāṇā Kumbha. This was on the 4th August 1889.

This was followed by a few other insipid pieces. *Lakṣa Hīrā* staged in Feb. 1891 was the last.

Raj Krishna Babu was not only a good-natured and generous man, but he was also a man of great culture. He was an erudite Sanskrit scholar, a poet and a fairly noted dramatist. He was astonishingly quick in his compositions and had a great presence of mind. But aftar all, Raj Krishna Babu was not a business-like manager. He could not allot specific duties to different persons and in all things he was behind the time. Besides, there were persons to sow seeds of dissension between his party and the Ārya Nāṭya Samāj. At last, due to a misunderstanding over a very petty matter about the supply of betels, they separated after a few months. The Binā could not revive again, prices of tickets were considerably reduced and Binā unable to proceed further was compelled to close for good.

We ahall however see that after Girish Chandra's departure from the Star Theatre, Raj Krishna Babu's services as a dramatist were availed of there at the suggestion of the manager, Mr. Bose.

(II) THE EMERALD THEATRE

We have left the Emerald theatre since Girish

left it for the 'Star' towards the beginning of 1889. As the theatre did not run well with Mati Sur and others, Gopal Lal Seal again took charge of the theatre within a few months securing again the services of Babu Kedar Nath Choudhury as Manager and the dramatist Monomohan Bose as director. There were a number of good artists including Ardhendusekher Mustafi, Mohendra Lal Bose, Matilal Soor, Sukumari Dutta, Haribhusan Bhattacharya, Bishad Kusum, but the theatre continued from bad to worse. A history of the time can be gathered from the contemporaneous observations of the *Naba Bibhākar* and *Sādhāranī* of 31st May 1889 which we give below :—

> "Although advertisements were in glowing terms, for the performence of *Kṛṣṇa Kumārī*, audience was very small. Many others, again, left owing to bad acting. The result was very unhappy. The reasons of the failure were: 1. Emerald has lost good name and reputation (Sunām). (Probably the critic borrowed the experssion from *Profulla* which was being staged at that time at the 'Star'), 2. No good acting is noticeable, the gestures of the actors and postures are open to exception. 3. Entry and exit not good. 4. Arrangements specially concert and prompting bad, and as the actors are, so the actresses, *Jamon Devā, Tamon Devī.* Gopal Lal Seal ought to pay greater attention. We do not say that Monomohon Babu and

Kedar Babu are unfit, but the co-operation of really talented men is necessary.

The paper further observed :—

"As to the representation, the dramatist himself would have been much grieved at the decline in acting since the time it was first acted at the public theatre although one or two actors were still here... The last Act, however was rendered creditably. Credit was due more to Mr. Mustafi. The first part of Dhonodas was not happily done, but the last part was very appealing. In Bheemsing too, he had this defect. The last portion was much better than the beginning. But he should not have acted two leading parts at the same drama. He is no doubt an embodiment of a jestor but immediately to come in the serious dress of the Raja from the comic was not befitting the occasion. The part of Ronendra as played by a distinguished actor Mohendra Bose was not very satisfactory. Jagat Sing was very badly done. This youngman exhibited evil tastes at the love-scenes...Bilāsbatī and Madonikā were not bad but Kṛṣṇa Kumāri and Ahalyā were not above the common-place. The song by the two sannyasis was sweet and touching and made some compensation to the dissolving gathering (Bhāṅgā Hāt). "

We may mention here some of the performances of the Emerald :—

8th June 1889—*Rāsh Līlā* by Monomohon Bose. The part of Kālindi was played by Mrs. Sukumari Datta.

13th July—*Shorojā* (by Radhamadhab Kar).

21st July—*Bakkesvar* (by Atul Krishna Mitra) Mr. Mustafi taking the part of Bakkeswar.

As to the acceptance of these dramas by the public, we shall quote some observations of the *Navabibhākar* and *Sādhāraṇī* of 12.8.89 corresponding to 26th Sraban, 1296. So it writes—

"Kedar sang the parting song shortly after his association with the Emerald, of which he took the helm with great enthusiasm. The tune Girish set to the strings of the Emerald was not brooked by Gopal. Monomohon showed his own Lilā in *Rās Līlā* of Śṛkṛṣṇa. In this hopeless dilemma (vaidya sankat), Keder came, but the whirl-wind did not still stop.

"The place of religious fervour formerly produced on the stage has now been replaced by the piteous scenes of tragic-dramas of *Saralā*, *Profulla*, *Sailojā* *Sorojā* and *Bakkesvar*. Kedarnath makes some compensation for many shortcomings but the parts have not been well selected".

Bakkesvar after a few nights' run was, however, stopped by the order of the Government on the representation of Pandit Sivanath Sastri as being

scandalous and defamatory. It made some satirical and caustic remarks about a Brahmo gentleman and the private tutor of his house over certain matters.

On the 19th Oct. 1889 a social drama *Kiroṇ-śaśi* was staged but Kedarnath could not continue long. He became invalid and his health broke down. He left in November 1889. Thus drops off one of the earliest and noted managers, and we donot after this hear anything of him till his death in 1891.

After Kedarnath left, Atul Mitra's, *Gopī Goṣṭha* was staged on the 13th December 1889 and had in its cast Pandit Haribhuson as Āyān, Kusum (Bishad) Kṛṣṇa, Biḍāl as Rādhikā, Khetromoni Jatilā and Guliphan Hari Kutilā. The X'mas skit *Bhāger mā Gongā pāinā* was also amusing.

Then was *Ānanda Kumār* played for two nights (Jan 1890). It gives the story of Nanda Kumar, but the European names were substituted by Mahomedan names. The Commissioner of Police however, coming to know what it was, stopped the performance.

Poet Rabindranath's famous drama *Rājā O Rāṇī* commencing from the 7th June 1890 had a run for about fifteen nights. The part of Kumār Sen was acted by Mohendra Babu. His "Ilā, Ilā, dourḍe ese fire genu" O Ila ! Ila ! I go back even after reaching your door ; and to Sumitra "Balo Bon pāribe Ki', Tell sister, will you be able ?—still rings in the

ears of persons who have heard it. Babu Matilal Sur's Vikram Deb was also a master-piece. The part of Devadatta was taken by Pandit Hari Bhusan, that of Śaṅkar by Chunilal Mitra, Rāṇī by Kironshashi and Ilā by Bishad Kusum.

This drama was a great success.

On the 14th September 1890, another small piece *Shanda* or pre-historic fool was staged. It was a faithful specimen of a new way to pay old debts. *Anupama* was staged on the 13th Dec. 1890. It was a grim tragedy in five acts by Upendra Nath Mukherjee of Bhowanipore.

After Kedar Babu left, in 1891 January, Babus Mati Soor, Mohendra Bose, Atul Krishna Mitra and Purna Ghose became lessees, with Mati Soor as manager and Atul Mitra as business-manager. In 1891 when the Manipur war was raging, Dinobondhu Mitra's *Kamale Kāminī* was staged under the name *Maṇipur Juddha*! Two other pieces *Netāi Līlā* and *Lālā Golok Chānd* deserved better mention. In 1892 New Year's Day *Bidhabā College* was staged, but the above ones were all worthless pieces.

A theatre cannot continue without good dramas and the Emerald Theatre sorely felt the want of dramas. So inspite of the services of a number of good artists it had on its boards, it began to decline.

In 1892 Mohendra Bose became the sole lessee and put on its boards *Bisbṛksa*, *Mṛṇālinī*, *Kapālkuṇḍalā*, *Palāśīr Juddha* and similar dramas which he had acted in the old *National*.

Bisbṛksa commencing from June 1891 continued for about three months, the parts of Devendra, Nagendra, Surjamukhi, Kundo, Kamal, Hira and Srish being taken respectively by Purna Ghosh. Mohendra Bose, Sukumari, Harisundari (Blackie), Gulphon Hari, Bhabatarini and Preonath Ghose. The drama though old was a success.

Kapālkuṇḍalā was staged from Sept. 10. 1892.

Kṛṣṇa Kānter Will of Bankim Chandra was staged on the 7th Dec. 1892, with Purna Babu as Krishna Kanta, Mohendra Babu Govindalal, Sib Chandra Chatterjee Brahmanonda, Sukumari Rohini and Blackie Hari as Bhramar. Even with so many good artists, it did not however produce half the interest and sensation as Amarendra Nath's performance of the same novel under the caption of *Bhramar* did seven years after, though here the dramatisation by Mr. Atul Krishna Mitra, or the rendering of the different parts was in no way inferior to those of the subsequent Classic Theatre on the same pavilion.

Towards the close of the year there was furthur diminution in strength owing to Mr. Mustafi's departure for the Minerva and though he again came in

1894 as the lessee, the Emerald could hardly revive one-fourth its former reputation when Girish was at its helm. Babu Mohendra Bose who had taken lease of the Emerald suffered losses and gave up the lease in February 1894 and joined the Bengal Theatre.

Babu Ardhendu Sekhar Mustafi came from the Minerva Theatre in January 1894 and took its management as lessee along with Atul Babu in February 1894. Old plays in which Mr. Mustafi was at his best were now put on boards after which the theatre was suspended for sometime. It however reopened on September 22, 1894, with Atul Krishna Mitra's *Mā*, a new religious drama based upon Annadāmangal's *Chaṇḍī*. Though the adaptation of the poem for the stage was not, as the *Statesman* remarked, very successful but the play introduced some scenes and situations which were really effective. Of the several characters, Sadhanā and Kālketu deserved special notice and the songs of Sadhanā were conspicuous for their beauty and sweetness. On the 8th December the same author's *Mān* or *Rādhākṛṣṇer Līlā* was played on the 8th December where Sukumari who had come from the Royal Bengal by this time for a short time (only) took the part of Brindā and Bishad Kusum that of Radhikā.

In 1895 *Rājā Basanta Roy* was played with Purna Babu in the titular role, Kusum as Surama and

Sukumari as Bibha. A new play of *Phool-Sajjya* by Pandit Khirode Prasad was staged on the 31st August 1895. Thus after a few performances the Emerald Theatre had afterwards to be closed about April 1896.

In September 1896 a model Dramatic Association composed of the actors and actresses of the late Emerald Theatre company, gave its last performance with *Mādhabi Kankan* on the Beena Stage with Purno Babu as Narendranath, after which it was heard no more.

The short career of the theatre is absolutely due to want of good dramatists and capable management. Readers however remember that Girish Chandra's *Pūrno Chandra* alone gave Rs. 20,000 as the *Reis and Rayyet* hinted

Mr. Mustafi was its last lessee.

We shall here pause a little to give an account of Mr. Mustafi. He was a great comedian and in Minerva Theatre his talents were displayed to their greatest advantage, If twenty years before that, he attained great celebrity in Rājeeblochan, Dhonodās and mostly as Chhātulal and Jaladhar and by wonderfully representing the last part earned the title of Sir John Falstaff. His *Ābu Hossain* and *Barunchand* put him now to the climax. Girish too had reasons to be greatful to him, as books which were considered by the autho-

rities of the Star as coined from the brain of a maniac, drew mostly-crowded houses in Minerva, with his Ābu and Barunchand. Indeed those were the days of Mustafi's histrionic triumph. But to his misfortune he left the Minerva to become the lessee of the Emerald. Here he made a wrong choice, he sustained great loss not only in his histrionic reputation but also in money. He, not fully comprehend, that without Girish's superb creations his talents could not find their full play. We should, however, quote Girish's words about the cause of his failure :

"When Nāgen Babu started Minerva Theatre, myself and Ardhendu were, again, re-united. In the interval he travelled over different places. In the four roles he was in *Macbeth*, his former reputation was revived. Next, Abu in *Ābu Hossain* Barunchand in *Mukul Muñjurā* and Vidushaka in *Janā* began to enchant audience, and their praises knew no bounds. Next, after two or three nights' performance as Vidushaka he with a view to become a proprietor of a theatre took lease of the Emerald Stage. Some artists too followed him. But this was a great mistake of his life. He was an actor but not a business-man. He could train, but how could all things be managed in time, he did not possess that idea or have the training. For his anxiety to minute details, he would very often ignore other principal or important matters. He realised his own

drawback while the theatre failed. He fell into debts and his residential house was sold for paying his creditors."

Ardhendu's absence was however greatly felt, but how did Girish fill up that want? Did he suffer? No, not in the least. Tincowrie was gone, Ranu Babu was gone and above all, Ardhendu, the infinite master of gests also left for the Emerald. What then became of the Minerva? And thus Girish describes* :—

"Ranu Babu leaves Minerva. Rasa-sāgore Ardhendu also starts a rival theatre. None dared appear in the roles of Barunchand and Abu. The place of dancing master remained still unfilled. At such a crisis was found Babu Gobordhon Banerjee, a lover of art. He filled up the place of Ranu Babu and took up the two inimitable roles of Ardhendu. Thus was the reputation of Minerva kept up by Gobordhone Babu with credit. But the void by his absence on service to the Maharaja of Kassimbazar still remains the same."

THE CITY THEATRE.

The Name of Babu Nilmadhab Chakerburty is associated with the City and Aurora Theatres. We have seen how as a growse against the proprietors of the Star Theatre for the discourtesy shown to

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* *Vide Rangālaye Nepen* by Girish Chandra.

their leader Girish Chandra, Nilmadhab broke off from the 'Star' and after some performances in private houses he took lease of the Beena Theatre. From the 16th May 1891 when the *Chaitanya Līlā* was staged, it continued for about two years, with Probodh Ghosh and others.

After some performances at the Beena Stage were shown it was for some time suspended with the rise of Minerva where a good number, of its artists had joined. It re-opened on the 7th October, 1893 with *Sarala,* and after having staged old dramas of Girish Chandra and farces and *Tarubālā* of Amritalal Bose, it put on its boards some new operas, including *Ānanda Laharī* or *Hari Līlā* on the 9th December 1893 and *Behadda Behāyā* on the 24th February 1894.

For some time it was again stopped and another theatre under the name of *Gaity* showed some performances of the like—*Makare Netai* in imitation of *Karamati-bāī* of Minerva and *Prologonkari* in imitation of Star's *Stribuddhi.*

Nilmadhab's zeal was not however abated. He next took lease of the Minerva for a few nights (11th April to 30th May 1896) as it was then in hopelessly miserable plight owing Girish's departure in March 1896 but was eventually forced to leave.

Nilmadhob Babu then took lease of the Emerald Theatre for ten months beginning from the 20th June

1896. Although in the first few months the City could not do much,* it attained a name and fame in the representation of *Devī Choudhurāṇī* dramatised by Babu Atul Krishna Mitra. Here Nilmadhab Chakraburty as Bhabāni Pāthok admirably suited the character, both by appearance as also by his gravity of voice and serene gestures. Probodh Ghosh acted the part of Brojeswar, Devi's part was taken by younger Golap, Haraballav by Chandi Charan De, Lt. Brenun by Gostho Chockerbuty and Nishi by Bishad Kushum. The play was very successful and Chandi Charan truly represented the character as depicted by Bankim Babu and not a comic figure as was subsequently shown by some artists at the Classic.

The career of the party was however cut short in 1897, when they were evicted in the month of Chaitra 1303 B.S. by the appearance of Babu Amarendra Nath Dutt and his Classic Theatre.

Nilmadhab hereafter tried some performances at the Bengal Stage under the name of "Aurora Theatre", but of this later.

THE BENGAL THEATRE.

In the second volume of *The Indian Stage* we have described how the Bengal Theatre started with

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* *Mādhobi* was staged on 5th September and *Saraswat Kunja* on 26th September, 1896.

actresses and associated as it was with the great name Michael Madhusudon Dutt received liberal patronage of the theatre-going public from the very beginning. When however the great National Theatre was greatly shaken by prosecution and legislative enactment, it was not touched at all. On the other hand, it was fortunate to secure some of the prominent artists of the rival theatre. In 1877, however, for the first time when Girish arranged performance of *Meghnādbadh*, he showed the defective way practised by Bengal Theatre in reading the poet's metre in a prose style. Although popular, the Bengal Theatre had none of the cultural atmosphere of the 'National' and its performances were more of the old jātrā type, as *Durvāṣā Pāraṇ*, *Rājsuya Jajña*, *Bhīṣma Saraśajjyā*, *Sidhubadh* etc.

Bengal Theatre also rendered a number of Bankim Chandra's novels into dramas for the stage. Scarcely was a piece well-rendered or did the acting represent the spirit of characters truly. But deffierent was the case with the performance of *Durgeś-nandinī* where all the parts were done to satisfaction and it was a treat, never to be witnessed any where to see Sarat Babu on horse-back in the role of Jagat Sing.

On the other hand the rendering of the some of the best novels of Bankim Chandra marred the effect altogether. In *Chandra Śekhar* staged on the

16th March 1878, characters were represented as follows :—

Chandra Sekhar	...	Beharilal
Protap	...	Haridas Das
Foster	...	Sarat Chandra
Dalanī	...	Bonobiharini
Kusum	...	Elokeshi

Mrs. Sukumari Dutt used to a appear as Girijāyā in *Mṛṇālinī*, Kiran Banerji as Pasupati,, Haridas as Hemchandra and Beharilal as Mādhabāchārya.

The Bengal Theatre however obtained a recognition from the Government in 1878 which even Girish's theatre did not. His Excellency Lord Lytton the Viceroy of India and his consort—Her Excellency Lady Lytton—accompained by Sir Richard Temple, Lieutenant Governor of Bengal visited the Bengal Theatre and were much pleased with the performance of *Śakuntalā* on the 18th June, 1878, and praised the scenery etc very much.* It was on

* Thus writes *Englishman* Monday 21st Jan. 1878.

"The Bengal Theatre"—On Friday night, their Excellencies Lord and Lady Lytton, with Sir Richard Temple accompanied by their respective suits, visited this Theatre and witnessed the play of *Sakuntalā* or the *Lost Ring*. We understood that this is the first occasion on which Viceroy has ever visited a native Theatre. Great pains were unmistakably taken by the management to make every thing pleasant for their Excellencies and the manner in which the piece was put on the stage reflects much credit on the proprietor. The scenery was very good, the dresses of the

the occasion of a benefit performance organised for the aid of the Society for prevention of the cruelty to animals.

It must however be remembered that the actors of the Bengal did not lack talents ; some of them could have turned the best, but what was wanting was the supply of dramas and proper training in the art of acting, in both of which they were no match for Girish's parties.

In 1880 when the Bengal Theatre put on boards *Aśrumoti Nāṭak* by Sj Jyotirindra Nath Tagore, it began to draw crowds. Girish had no drama at this time and was not connected with any theatre then. The first drama of Girish *Ananda Raho* had a stamp of *Aśrumotī* in it as we said before. But "the Bengal" suffered an irreparable loss in the death of its founder Babu Sarat Chandra Ghose in 1880, a prince all round. The Bengal Theatre showed some honour to his memory by staging the same drama of *Aśrumotī* on the 11th Dec. 1880. It is

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artists were effective and the dialogues good, though with somewhat of a tendency to drag, specially in the bee scene in which a young lady and two attendants are concerned at the extraordinary behavior of a bee of immense dimensions. Lord and Lady Lytton having stayed an hour in the theatre, left a little before 11 o'clock. The theatre was crammed and must have contributed materially to the funds of the society for the prevention of "Cruelty to Animals"

said that on a certain occasion when Grish undertook to play in the role of Protap Singh he proceeded but after some progress in the play when he saw that his (Protap's) daughter was in love with the Mogul prince, he left the theatre in the middle of the play in disgust, so strong and deep was his love and regard for national sentiments.

Next attraction for Bengal was the performance of *Prolhād Charitrā* as written by the poet Raj Krishna Roy. It was successful not only in the theatre but also as a Jātrā performance. Jogindra Ghatak was good in the role of Hironya Kaśipoo and the part of *Prolhād* was so marvellously rendered by an actress of the name of Kusum, that she used to be called here-after as *Prohlād Kusum.*

Thus did the Bengal Theatre continue in its race and in 1891 it assumed the dignified title "Royal Bengal Theatre", in as much as it had the good fortune of being asked to show a few scenes during the visit of His Royal Highness Prince Albert Victor, elder son since deceased, of the then Prince of Wales (afterwards King Edward VII) and elder brother of King George V.

In the 1894, the company received fresh impetus in its strength. Babu Mohendra Bose, the great tragedian, who gave up the lease of the Emerald Theatre joined the Bengal Theatre with Mrs. Suku-

mari Dutt. Babu Probodh Ghose (nephew of Sarat Babu), left the "City" and came here and Miss Promoda Sundari too came from the "Star." The Bengal Theatre with the added strength began now to stage the old pieces, *Mṛṇālinī Aśrumatī Durgeṣ Nandinī Pūrobikram* and *Biṣbṛkṣa* specially. In the last play the cast was as follows :—

Nagendra	...	Mohendra Bose.
Debendra	...	Mathura Chatterji.
Surjamukhi	...	Mrs. Dutt.
Srīś	...	Hari Das Dass.
Kamalmoni	...	Promoda.
Kunda	...	Harimoti (Blackie)

About the success of the play *Statesman* thus observes—

"...The manner in which *Biṣbṛkṣa* was played on Sunday last fully satisfied the anticipation that had been excited. Most of the parts were well-filled but special mention may be made of the actor who represented the character of Nagendra the husband who falls a victim to the poison-tree and to the actresses who represented the characters of wronged-wife and her innocent rival. The actor who appeared as Debendra should, however, have been entrusted with a less important part."

In 1895, on Feb. 2nd, *Rajanī* a well-known fiction of Bankim Chandra dramatised by Behari Lal Chatterji was put on boards. It was a great success and audience was quite large, Mohendra Bose taking

the part of Sachindra, Haridas Babu of Amarnath, Sukumari of Rajani and Nistarini as Labangalota. Of the performance *Anuśīlan* (Falgun 1301 B. S.) thus writes :—

> Sukumari truly represented Rajani in all aspects. Although she was aged but by her acting and poises she remedied that defect. She truly represented what Bankim Chandra writes about Rajani—
>
> "Rajani is blind from birth, but her eyes donot indicate that. No defect is noticeable from the eyes, they are large, bluish in colour with bee-like black pupil. O, how beautiful are they." Mrs. Sukumari wonderfully succedeed in imitating the visionless eyes of the blind girl.

Towards the middle of the 1895, Babu Mohendra Lal Bose left for the Minerva Theatre and probably some time before, Miss Promoda too left. This reduced the strength of the party and we have not much to note except that it staged *Rājsiṇha* on the 8th Jan. 1896 in competition with Star, and on the 5th Sep. 1896, a benifit performance was given for the assistance of the widow of Sarat Babu the founder of the theatre and on 30th Dec., some of the congress leaders including Pandit Ananda Charlu, the then leader of Madras were invited at the performance of *Sakuntalā* and *Mohaśel.*

In 1897 in competition with City on the Emerald Stage it showed some activity in staging

'*Devī Choudhnrānī* from Feb. 27, when *Kṛṣṇa Kānter Will* was staged from June 2, 1897 and the *Anuśīlan* 1304 Ashar writes eulogistically about the performance.

In 1898, (Feb. 19) *Daraf Khan* was played with Sukumari as Maimuni and on the 24th September, *Promode Rañjan* another enchanting opera of Kshirode Prasad (of *Alibaba* fame) was staged in which Nripendra Bose the dancing expert of Abdala fame appeared as Chanchal Kumar. This had a good run and was followed by *Kumārī* a melo-drama in 1899 (staged on 26th August). Next *Protimā*—a play by Behari Babu—was staged on 8th Dec, 1900,

Thus the Theatre continued but after the performance of a social piece *Nīhār* on the 16th March 1901, a serious tragedy befell the Bengal Theatre. Babu Behari Lal Chatterji the life and soul of the 'Bengal Theatre' who by versatile compositions, able management and self-less devotion kept up its reputation even in the teeth of hard competition, breathed his last on the 24th April 1901 and with his death the Bengal Theatre closed its doors. It commenced with death, it was shaken by death, and now it ends with death.

Girish Chandra Ghose wrote a short biography of his and Babu Amrita Lal Bose also paid high encomiums on Beharilal.

Chapter VII

THEATRE AT GUJRAT

In our first volume of the Indian Stage we have spoken of the Sanskrit dramas and also described how a Bengali dramatist Madana composed *Pārijāt Moñjurī Nāṭikā* for a prince of Gujrat which has been preserved in a slab of black stone. Sanskrit was the court language of Gujrat and the Rāmayana, Mahābharata, Purānas and Smritis as also the classical works of Bhasa and Kalidasa influenced the culture of Gujrat as much as it did that of Bengal. In reality also, Gujrat made considerable improvement in Sanskrit, drama and stage.

Of the Sanskrit dramatists at Gujrat the most noteworthy was Ram Chandra (1093-1174) whose *Nala Vilasha* deserves great mention. He also composed ten more dramas of different varieties—Nātaka, Prakarana, Nātikā, Vyayaga and also wrote a treatise—*Natyadarpana* which contains valuable quotations from lost plays and is a store-house of literary and historical material.

Ram Chandra tried to introduce realism into the drama by eliminating some of its miraculous incidents like the news sent through swan in *Nala Vilāsha*.

About the time Rāma Chandra flourished, drama made great progress and plays were as a rule performed in temples with some kind of scenic display, on festive or religious occasions. Ram Chandra for the first time stressed on the fact that an actor must always feel and the most realistic actor is he who is the most natural. What Ram Chandra maintained about thousand years ago must also be the guiding factor with actors of India to-day. Attempts to display art with arms and legs and raising voice to an unnecessary length are to be always deprecated. None should forget the saying "Best art is to conceal art."

Ram Chandra however was practically alone and there were few to take up his work. In the next period although drama was scanty, Rasa formed the chief amusement for the people. It is a sort of dance accompanied by songs when men and women used to take part. Generally legends of Krishna were resorted to and there was abundance of such things during the Holi festival (spring time). *Rasa* also formed the basis of Yāṭrā—akin to Yātrās at Bengal which used to be performed also by amateurs at fairs and religious festivals.

The next stage of dramatic history in Gujrat introduces us to a versatile writer Premananda (1636-1734) who in his Ākhyāns taken from Mahabharata and Ramayana generally wanted to make

Gujrati language as rich and beautiful as Sanskrit. He was a great reformer in literature and although the dramas *Rashadarshika*, *Satyabhama Akshyan* and *Pañchali Prasannakhyan* ascribed to him may be of doubtful authenticity, it is to be undeniable that the change he brought upon the Gujrati literature exercised a great influence on dramas of Gujrat in its own language. Gujrati drama owes, indeed, a great debt to him. After this, Gujrat from 14th to 18th century had no stage and nor any dramatic literature worth the name. The Gujrati *Bhabais* were only improved forms of *Rasas* and up to the 19th century the *Bhabais* performed often by wandering players in villages in the nature of farces were the only drama liked by the people, rather by the people of the low classes. Episodes mostly from Kṛṣṇa's life were generally taken and crudely staged in melās (fairs) or in Vaiṣṇava temples uuder the name of *Raslila*. Here a large number of Garabī were also used. Garabī dances began however to be disliked with the spread of education and the *Bhabai* farces, exhibiting much of vulgarity began also to give shock to cultured minds. At this stage a Katha Samaj was formed and Ranchhodbhai Udayaram a leader of the same (1838-1923) aspiring to rise above the low dramas took a bold step and proceeded in his efforts with something like missionary zeal. He first translated some Sanskrit pieces and as time went on, wrote a good book *Jayakumar* as also the

mythological drama *Harish Chandra*. But what spread his fame was his social tragedy—the first tragedy in Gujrat—*Lalita Dukṣaharana Darshaka Nataka*, Here the heroine, a cultured girl, was married to a common man Nandan and the trials and tribulations and the ill treatment of the husband formed the main theme ending with the death of the girl which she was driven to seek. It was staged at Bombay by the Parsi Theatrical Companies as also elsewhere by amateurs and created such a sensation with the audiences that the name Nandan came to be hereafter regarded as a name of disrepute—a synonym for a heartless rake. Its chief merit was novelty. Indeed Ranchhodbhai's attempts met with remarkable success and with the dramas as staged, theatre became a popular and respectable resort for middle classes—a centre not only of entertainments but also of instruction and social reform.

Ranchhodbhai was however practically alone in the last century and his attempts were not followed up. None took up the matter in right earnest. Drama fell down and Novel took its place in the popular imagination.

Dramas not being taken by Gujrati authors, the Parsi authors in search of pure artistic expressions for their dramas began to use Parsi-Gujrati as distinguished from pure Gujrati and the Gujrati language thus received a set-back although the

pure Gujrati was now and again resorted to in amateur threatres in Gujrat.

The Parsees are very advanced in matters of theatre. They have the adaptability of correctly imitating English manners. They also have some claims to both Sanskrit and Persian culture. From the beginning they took to theatre and made considerable improvement in stage-craft. They produced plays in Gujrati, Mahrati and Urdu and took stories from Hindu legends. Of them and their contributions we shall narrate in the next volume but this is certain that pure Gujrati drama took a long time to flourish again, although Gujrat is indebted to a certain extent to the Parsis for their modern stage.

The Parsi shows again differed a great deal from the tradition of the Gujrati stage. Their gaudy and dazzling scenery and the vehement acting did not suit the tastes of the Gujrati people. Fortunately "The Gujrati Company" as a business concern was started in 1878 which was again followed by "the Morbi" of Baghaji Ozen and Vankaner Nataka Samajas which revived the stage suited to the tradition of the people. Of the traditions for the new move the name of a teacher Mr. Narottam deserves special mention. The growth from amateur to professional is practically contemporaneous with the National Theatre of Bengal started in 1872.

The Garabi dance which was very much in use in

Gujrat, as we saw, declines but the above theatrical companies with a tradition of Kathiavada gave Garabi again a place on the stage. Garabi got a fresh impetus and found now favour with Gujrati women. Poet Nanalal furnished the literary accompaniment. He collected about 200 Garabis and the progressive women and boys have made of the Garabi an artistic dance.

Although the *Morbi and Vankaner Nataka Samajas* followed the lines laid down by Ranchhodbhai and generally staged plays based on the Purana, art was rather miserable and the introduction of farces made the exhibition rather disgusting.

Dahyabhai Dholshaji (1867-1906) made great improvement on the stage. He founded the *Deshi Nataka Samaja* and staged *Aśrumati*, *Udaybhānu* and *Vinaveli* and other dramas which created a great sensation at Gujrat. The songs introduced were entertaining and much improvement on Garabi dance was effected. The technique and literary tone of the dramas were much improved and plots were taken not only from Purana but also from history and contemporary life. With the spread of Garabi, Dholshaji's stage influenced the social life and literature of Gujrat very much.

After Dholshaji's death, there was again a setback in Gujrati theatre. At this time Babu Amrita Krishna Nayak, a player and a composer became a

prominent figure. He was once associated with Parsi Theatre and was skilled in histrionic arts. The Urdu play *Zeri Sappa* or the *Venomous Serpent* (1904) was partly composed by him and as a play of passion, it took Bombay by storm. For years it was a great liking with people to see it enacted as some play slike *Kinnari* and similar operas were seen in Bengal. Gujrati stage was very much influenced by such plays for the worse and realism was practically driven out.

We have said before of Nanalal as a composer of Garabi songs. He was also a dramatist of merit. His dramas *Indukumāra* (1909) *Joyjoyanṭa* (1914) *Rājarṣi Bharata* (Sakuutala's son) (1922) *Jahangir-Nurjahan*, *Akbar and Shajahan* deserve mention. No doubt he contributed greatly to the growth of Gujrati drama and stage but his plays are a poet's plays meant more for the study than for the stage. Dialogue rather than situation, poetry rather than drama, idealism rather than realism, types rather than characters are some of the characteristics of his plays.

Ramanbhai Nilkant's *Raino Parrat* composed in 1914 is also a good play.

Srijut Kanaiyalal Maneklal Munshi, another dramatist of merit has also written a number of dramas based on Pouranic and social subjects. His Pouranic dramas *Purandarparājoya* (1922) *Abicaktama*

(1931) *Tarpana*, *Lopamudra* are good and the social dramas *Be Kharabi Jana*, *Kakani Shashi*, *Brahmacharyasrama* are racy and sparkling productions.

The Gujrati people are by nature businessmen and they have shown generally an apathy in theatrical entertainment. Consequently growth of the stage has not been rapid as has been in Bengal or even in Maharastra. The popularity of the film also for the last 30 years has been a cause of the paucity of the dramas. Still the attempts of a few patriotic gentlemen to revive the theatre of the Hindus at Gujrat deserve praise. At Gujrat female artists have just begun to take part in theatrical representations. It is also seen that plays with female artists are much more popular than plays however well rendered by boys in the roles of female characters. Indeed if a professional company shows performances in any town in Gujrat, audience generally becomes large, showing that a good film is no substitute for a good play.

Although mixed acting has not yet been universally accepted by the social conscience, and wiseacres still hold that 'no play' is rather preferable to plays with women, amateur circles, however, in Bombay and sometimes in Ahmedabad and even in some of the colleges now after a great deal of struggle have taken to mixed acting. Of those whose efforts in this connection have been made in right dirction, Prof. B. K. Thakore and a noted young

playwright Chandravadan Mehta (B. 1901) deserve special mention. The latter is a poet (of *Ila Kabya* and *Visarjan*, etc.) and teacher and has written many plays. Not only he rendered foreign plays into Gujrati but also wrote some realistic plays like *Ag Godi* (The Iron Road,) *Naga Bava*, the *naked Fakirs* and *Santa Kookdi* (*Hide and Seek*) &c. Boys and girls played together in his plays and Mr. Thakore is to be congratulated on the vigorous efforts he has made for the improvement of the Gujrati Stage.

There are also budding writers like Yashbant Pandya, Batubhai Umarvadia, Umasankar Joshi, Indulal Gandhi and others but there is still much needed for actable plays and better productions. Attempts are in progress and it will take yet a fairly long period to make Stage and Theatre thoroughly nationalistic.

Gujrat ought to bear in mind that without a developed and regulated stage national education does not get full scope as has been fully illustrated through the nationalistic dramas of Girish Chandra Ghosh on the Bengali stage. Without females also, a stage is not full and no matter what class* they belong to, they must however be thoroughly disciplined and no kind of

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* In Bengal Srijuktas Binodini, Khetromoni, Tincowrie, Tarasundari, Sukumari, Sushila are glaring examples of most disciplined and cultured artists though most of them come of unreputed origin for which, of course, they are not responsible.

indulgence or weakness is to be tolerated by the managers in any way. The latter too should be high in principles and maintain dignity of the position they are supposed to hold. If such a state occurs, as occured under Girish Ghosh, even with people mostly illiterate and persons taken from unholy surroundings, the stage of today with new recruits of artists from educated society, will assuredly play a very great and important part in the evolution in our social and national life. Mere degrees of a university are not the criterion of the real improvement but a disciplined and nationat stage is what India needs very badly today.

There is also another danger. The film has grown in popularity and the so-called dramas of today are either lacking in life or have engrafted in them much of matters from the western ideas which do not suit our people in our society. All provinces must be feeling this. Much display is also shown by many of our artists at the cost of natural acting. For a number of years Stage has rather a growth to the opposite direction. It is, however, a happy sign of the times that in Calcutta an association with some men of lead and light (viz : Mr. Kiran Chandra Dutt, M.R.A.S., Pandit Asoke Nath Sastri, M.A.,P.R.S., Professor, University college, Mr. Kshitish Chandra Chakraborty, M. A., B. L., Advocate High Court, Mr. Dhirendra Nath Mukherjee, poet, and Mr. Kshetra Mohan Mitra, the distinguished actor

since Girish Chandra's time of *Balidān's Mohit* and *Serajaddula's Clive* fame, has been formed under the name of *Girish Parishad* the object of which is to play in the most natural way the soul-stirring and tragic dramas of Girish Chandra, and others of similar type. As an experimental measure the Parishad staged *Balidān* the great social tragedy of Girish Chandra, on the 13th of December 1943, at the board of the Minerva Theatre. The acting under the direction of Mr. Mitra, the last-named gentleman produced so great an effect on the audience —all possessed of culture, that the house in a voice declared its superiority over other kinds of acting with declamations and shows, as are generally resorted to today in the stages both Indian and foreign. It is a red-letter day for the Indian Stage which has given rise to this new school of acting and proved to demonstration that the performances of the tragedies of Girish Chandra are possible only with artists who feel most in the light of the characters drawn. The author welcomes the enterprise of *Girish Parishad* and wishes that if the Indian Stage in all provinces do seriously go on with its mission of introducing natural acting once more, it will make the greatest contribution to the general upheaval of the country in all its phases—national, social and religious.

Gujrat is very lucky in producing one of the greatest men of the world in Mahatma Gandhi, as Bengal has done in the case of Deshbandhu C. R.

Das whose colossal sacrifice due to the love of his country is unparalleled in the history of the world. Maharastra has also produced amongst others the great Bal Gangadhar Tilok. These eminent personages will also, I am sure, furnish enough materials for the National Stage of India.*

To the rising dramatists I should convey the caution as given by our savants—Bankim Chandra and Vivekanonda, Girish Chandra and Chittaranjan that India has abundant treasures of her own and we need not imitate any foreign ideals and thereby lower our national culture.

* For this chapter I am particularly grateful to Prof. Hiralal Godiwala, B.A. (Oxon) for his article "The Guzrati Theatre" (Modern Review, p. 599, 1938) and to Shri K. M. Munshi for his valuable book "Guzrat and its Literature". "The Indian Theatre" of my esteemed friend Dr. R. K. Yajnik has also been of great help to me.—Author.

Chapter VIII

THE MARATHI THEATRE.

The present volume is styled as the centenary edition not only because it commemorates the hundredth birth-day of the actor-dramatist Girish Chandra Ghose, but also for the reason that the centenary of the Marhatti Theatre was celebrated only a couple months ago at Sangli (Maharasttra).

The first Marathi drama was staged at Sangli in the year 1843. This is really surprising. The Marathas ruled over their own province and also over a major portion of the other provinces for over 150 years. Art and Industry develop with Royal aid, but the Maratha rulers had never a peaceful time. They were always at war with either the Mohamedans, the English, The French, the Portugese or other European powers who were trying to establish rule in India. They had, therefore, little or no time to enjoy the pleasures of a ruler and consequently the stage was neglected.

Man, however, always requires some sort of entertainment. Till the end of the 18th century *Harikatha* was the most popular and civilised type of recreation. Briefly, *Harikatha* is one man's performance. It is a sort of speech delivered in two parts.

The man delivering the speech must be thoroughly educated, and well-read. The speaker is known as 'Haridas'. He selects a good phrase either from the *Vedas*, *Rāmāyan*, *Mahābhārat*, *Bhāgvat Gītā* and explains the underlying idea to the audience. This is in the first part ; and in the latter part he relates a story embodying the moral of the first part. Music, Wits and Humours are resorted to for additional entertainment. This *Harikatha* is still very popular all over Maharashtra amongst all classes of men and women.

Harikatha is akin to Kathakatā in Bengal.

Since the beginning of the 19th Century other types of entertainments came into existence *e. g.*, *Lalit*, *Gondhal*, *Bahurupee* and *Dashavatar*. The idea for these seems to have been derived from the stage performances current in other provinces on the borders of Maharashtra. There is, however, no definite proof for this.

Lalit means variety. So this performance can be well explained by calling it "Variety performance" Here too as in *Harikatha* only religious items were depicted. In *Harikatha* only one man carries the show whereas in the *Lalit* many actors take part. The originator of *Lalit* was one *Dasopanta* Kshatriya by caste. He trained three other men, Savaji Mallappa of Poona, Waghoji of Baroda and Patil Bua of Bombay. Unfortunately there were

dissensions amongst these people and they separated and went to their respective places. Even to-day we see that no sooner either a Dramatic or Film producing Company comes into prominence it breaks down due to dissensions amongst founders, and Art suffers most. The Prabhat Film Company of Poona is a striking example. When the four founders of this Company were united the pictures produced at the Prabhat Studio successively won distinction at the International Exhibition at Geneva and public all over India used to eagerly await the release of Prabhat Pictures. To-day Prabhat is not even heard of.

Patilbua of Bombay referred to above coached some other men for this *Lalit* and the performances of *Lalit* by Patilbua and his men were excellent and popular and there was always tremendous rush of audience. Even to-day performance of *Lalit* takes place in villages. But this performance is quite different from that of olden days. *Gondhal* is also similar to *Lalit*. *Bahurupee* means those who can imitate anybody. This really is an art and in those days there were people who used to imitate anybody quite perfectly, speak any language fluently. There arose so many folk-tales about these *Bahurupee* from which it may be said that they existed since very old days. It is said that a *Bahurupee* once went to the Court of Aurangazeb. He was ordered to imitate a tiger. This man who wanted to revenge a

relative of the king killed him while acting as a tiger. The King then is said to have asked him to imitate a *Sati* and burned him alive. Another story current about the *Bahurupee* is that there was a *Bahurupee* at the time of Nana Phadnis. He could speak any Indian language fluently; it was really difficult to tell his nationality. He went to Poona and challenged Nana Phadnis to tell him his Nationality. This man was asked to come to the court the next day. In the meantime Nana instructed one of his servants to sprinkle cold water over the face of this man when asleep. When this was done he woke up muttering some words in Gujrati. From this Nana could tell that the fellow was a Gujrati.

Dashavatar was another type of entertainment. In this all the ten incranations of Lord Viṣṇu used to be depicted. Gods and Demons were the chief features. The Sword play by the *Demon* actors in this was the best and it is said that even Europeans at times used to see the *Dashavatars* only because of the sword play.

Tamasha was one more type of amusement. Mostly low class people used to perform these *Tamashas* and hence they were a bit vulgar. It is difficult to find out the name of the person who originated the *Tamasha*, but Bahiru, Malhari, Tatya Punekar, Dhondi Bapu, Sagan Bhau, Honaji Bal and Rama Gondhali are the people who developed the *Tamasha* into a good art. To perform a

Tamasha was not an easy task. The performers used to compose songs on the stage and the rival had to compose songs in reply. At times only one man had to sing for hours together which is certainly a feat. It is doubtful if our present-day 'Stars' can perform such feats. Both Girish Chandra and Ardhendusekhar of Bengal, specially the latter, could do this.

A Brahmin lad, Ramjoshi, was very much attracted towards these *Tamashas.* His relatives tried their best to persuade him away from the *Tamasha* because anybody connected with the *Tamashas* was looked down in the society. But Ramjoshi's love for *Tamasha* was considerable. He composed songs known as Lavani for these *Tamashas* and raised the status of the *Tamashas.* Even to-day Ramjoshi's compositions are recognised as standard. In the *Tamashas* an actor in female robes was first introduced on the Stage. Although Ramjoshi improved the *Tamasha* his brother did not appreciate it and when he found that the lad was not at all improving he was driven out of the house. In favour of Ramjoshi's brother it must be said that he was not totally to be blamed. Ramjoshi's family was well-known for its knowledge of Sanskrit and the society could not have tolerated a man from such a high family indulging in *Tamasha* which for years together, was considered as a low type of entertainment. Ramjoshi himself was a talented man and had

certain original ideas. Unfortunately for Maharashtra Stage and drama had not developed to any extent otherwise in Ramjoshi Maharashtra could have found a very good actor, and a very good dramatist. When driven out of the house, Ramjoshi really repented over his past behavior. He immediately went to Pandharpur and spent several years in learning Sanskrit under the guidance of one Padhye Shashtri. Being already a talented man Ramjoshi soon acquired proficiency in Sanskrit and after some years came back to his native place. He was acknowledged there to be the authority on Sanskrit. Afterwards he took up the profession of Haridas and here also attained a very high place.

Even to-day *Tamashas* are performed in some theatres in Maharashtra but the vulgarity in it is perhaps many times more than in early days. Civilised and respectable people do not visit these theatres and as stage has developed to a considerable extent now, nobody feels the necessity of patronising a *Tamasha*.

The Maratha Empire was lost in the year 1818. This is not a place to discuss whether the Britishers defeated the Marathas by virtue of their superiority in Arms or whether it was the fifth column activities that helped them to victory, the fact remains that the Maratha Empire was lost. With the exit of

the Marathas out of the picture there was no power in the whole of India to oppose the Britishers, Consequently there were no wars and peace prevailed in Maharashtra after quite a long time. Now the people of Maharashtra had time to pay attention to things other than politics. So a need was soon felt for some sort of public entertainment. The *Tamashas* could only serve the purpose partially. Respectable people and ladies could not attend the *Tamashas.* So there was a search for some other type of amusement.

In the year 1843 Shreemant Appasaheb Patwardhan was the ruler of Sangli State. This ruler was himself a well-read man and had maintained in his court not only Shastrees, Pandits, Musicians but also those who could show some special art. Further this ruler had the opportunity of seeing Kanarese dramas which were staged in cities around his state. It was his great desire that there must be Marathi dramas. Drama is not a new thing to Indians and so it was not to the Marathas. They had all read the world-renowned Sanskrit dramas of Bhasa, Kalidasa and other writers. The only thing was there was no peace of mind for the Marathas to pay attention to things like drama which, as compared with politics was certainly quite a negligible thing. Some how it was the fortune of Shreemant Appasaheb to be known as the first man to stage a Marathi drama. As aforesaid he was

keen about staging a Marathi drama and fortunately for him a man from his own State could fulfil his desire.

Vishnu Amrit Bhave holds the credit of staging the first Marathi drama. His father Amritrao was a Military Officer in the Sangli State. Vishnu Amrit Bhave, known as Vishnudas Bhave, had cultivated in him a number of arts when he was only 10. At the age of 12 he had made out of clay a small model of the Sangli town. He had made some toys, and like the Micky Mouse of today he could make these toys act in whatever way he desired. He was also well up in carpentry and structural engineering. He could also make decent carpets. In short there was nothing which Vishnudas did not know. It is but natural that a genius like him should win the credit of staging the first Marathi drama.

Vishnudas Bhave decided to fulfil the desire of his master and concentrated all his faculties on this theme. He soon succeeded in writing a drama and staging same. His first drama is "Sitaswayamwarm".

It must be mentioned here that Sitaswayamwarm is not the first Marathi drama although it is the first Marathi drama as staged. According to the late Mr. Rajawade, a drama by name Lakshmi Narayan Kalyan was written in the year 1662 by Shahu, ruler of Tanjore. The Marathi rule existed in Tanjore since the days of Chhatrapati

Shivaji and the State was abolished in 1848 by Lord Wm. Bentinck as there was no direct descendant. The Marathi rulers in Tanjore were content with the small State they had and did not bother about the activities the Marathas at Poona and Satara were carrying. The Tanjore rulers, therefore, paid attention to learning.

Although *Lakshmi Narayan Kalyan* is the first Marathi drama there is no record of the same being staged anywhere and the drama itself is known to very few people of Maharashtra. So without contradiction it can be said that *Sitaswayamwarm*—is the first Marathi drama staged.

All the dramas written by Vishnudas Bhave were mythological. Dramas other than mythological could not have been popular in those days, Even today we find that dramas and talkies depicting mythological themes become popular very soon. The Hindu mind is made like that. When things are so even in the 20th century, no wonder mythological dramas only could be popular in 1843.

This was the beginning of the Marathi stage. There were no theatres and dramas were staged in public temples or in the big houses of rich men. When there were no theatres, scenes, sceneries were things which were never thought of, Curtain there used to be only one. If today a drama with only one curtain, no scenes and sceneries is staged, it is

doubtful whether it can draw any audience. But in the beginning nothing more should be expected. Marathi stage has attained its present position only because Vishnudas Bhave was there.

Most of the dramas of Vishnudes Bhave were staged in the following manner. Sutradhar or the stage controller comes first. He was literally so in those days. Nearly from the beginning to the end he had to stay on the stage. The Sutradhar first used to sing in praise of the God, after which the Joker or Vidushaka or the fool used to enter. Discussion between these two then used to take place in the course of which they both used to have themselves introduced to each other. The Sutradhar then used to explain to the public the drama to be performed and so that the performance should end without any trouble, the Elephant-headed God Ganapati was exhorted. His blessing used to be obtained and on his advice the goddess of learning Saraswati was worshipped and her blessings obtained which assured that all actors would talk and act perfectly.

Most of the singing was done by the Sutradhar and it was his duty to introduce to the public in some way or other the actor who first entered the stage. There being only one curtain the necessary changes on the stage were carried out by the Joker. Judging with the standard of the present-day stage the above types of dramas will not be considered worth-staging and seeing. But this can be said in

1943 exactly 100 years after the first drama was staged. It has taken 100 years for the stage to develop to the present state. The Marathi public rightly holds Vishnudas Bhave in high esteem because it is to him that they owe too much for the stage.

Even to-day the Marathi stage, as compared with other provincial stages, particularly that of Bengal, is very poor in respect of Scenes and scenic representations. Marathi actors have therefore to depend upon a very high type of acting for the success of their performance.

From the year 1843 to 1851 Vishnudas Bhave used to stage his dramas, which as stated above were all mythological. In 1851 Shreemant Appasaheb Patwardhan the Ruler of Sangli died. Vishnudas Bhave thereafter decided to visit some other places in Maharashtra with his dramatic company. He first went to Kolhapur, the capital town of another small state, and then to Poona.

In 1851 the condition in Poona, the capital town of the Maratha kings, was rather different from that of previous years. The empire was lost in 1818. There being no wars, everybody had a peaceful time. Fortunately for the Britishers, the first Governor of that province was Mr. Elphistone who was a very shrewd man. He knew how to keep the people whose kingdom was taken over by the British, quiet.

He introduced many good measures, showed respect to Sardars and other big people of the olden days, and introduced new reforms for education. Thus the intelligent and learned people of Poona who were feeling that their kingdom had been lost, found in the beginning that the new rule was not altogether bad. The people, therefore, turned their attention towards various activities such as establishing schools for English education, publishing papers, opening new hospitals, establishing libraries and reading rooms, starting lectures and to add to all these activities the Municipality was brought into existence. Thus the people of Poona were busy with so many activities and had not to worry about wars. They were now in search for some sort of entertainment. They had heard of the dramas staged by Vishnudas Bhave and when he visited Poona with his Company he was well received.

Maharashtra is comparatively a poor province, but the Marathi people rank amongst the best people of India. Estates and Zemindaries as are seen in other provinces do not exist in Maharashtra. The province itself is not too fertile and consequently lawyers, medical practitioners etc., do not enjoy such large and lucrative practices as in other provinces. Further today the population of Maharashtra (Marathi speaking people) is nearly 2 crores, nearly 1/4 that of Bengal. Besides the Marathi speaking districts are divided under three Govern-

ments—some in the Bombay Province, some in the Central Provinces and some in the Nizam's dominions. So all these things together are a great handicap for the success of any activity. Where most of the languages of India have a University, the "Marathi" language is without a University of its own. From the above it can be judged that a dramatic company cannot earn very large amounts in Maharashtra. Firstly due to the comparatively less earning capacity of the people the entertainment-fees must not be too high. Secondly the Marathi people being only two crores in number, a dramatic company cannot visit a number of places and earn money. Still with all these odds against them the Marathi stage is certainly developed to a considerable extent.

In his first trip to Poona, Vishnudas Bhave did not earn much money ; but he gave to the Poona people a new idea. Ever since the beginning of the Maratha rule, Poona was in prominence and even after the kingdom was lost, the Poona people have maintained their high tradition All activities of Maharashtra have their origin in Poona. So when the Poona people saw that this new thing they started was making useful improvements, they extended its activities to other towns. Bombay also played equally good part in gradually improving the stage. From Poona Bhave went to Bombay where he could get a good theatre for his dramas. Thus

the Marathi public in Poona and Bombay got the new idea of entertainment and in both these towns the Marathi stage was developed.

By 1851 there were many people who had taken English education and this education was gradually spreading. People, therefore, were in a position to understand something of the foreign dramas and their ideas about drama were taking a good shape. Till 1875 the mythological dramas of Vishnudas could give sufficient entertainment to the Marathi public, but thereafter, as aforesaid, the ideas of people had changed and so the tastes. The then educated people had read not only the Sanskrit dramas of Kalidas and other authors but had also read dramas of Shakespeare. They had naturally better ideas about the stage which they used to bring into action by staging in schools and colleges Sanskrit and English dramas. In 1872 the students of a certain school in Poona had staged Shakespeare's 'Merchant of Venice' the directions regarding the performance were given by a European expert. Thus the tastes of the Marathi public had changed for the better and new dramas on new and upto date lines were eagerly awaited. The task of writing high class and nice dramas was taken up by great and cultured people like Parashurampant Godbole, Krishnshashtri Rajawade, Lele, Palande, Kolhatkar, Kirtane and others. Below is given a list of dram-

as showing the names of the respective authors and the year in which they were published.

Uttar Ram Charitra	1859	Parashurampant Godbole.
Parvati Parinaya	1872	do
Mrichhakatik	1881	do
Shakuntala	1881	do
Venisamhar	1881	do
Viratparva	1884	do
Mudra Rakshas	1867	Krishna Shastri Rajawade
Malati Madhava	1861	do
Vikramorshivaya	1874	do
Malavikagnimitra	1867	Ganesh Shashtri Lele
Vidhhashalbhanjika	1869	do
Prasanna Raghava	1859	Shivaramshashtri Palande,

From the names of the dramas mentioned above it is obvious that they were translated from Sanskrit into Marathi. None of the above dramas however was a success on the stage although literally they are of great value. The following dramas, some of which are translated from English, were really well received by the public when staged and the reason for this is that these dramas could cater to the taste of the people.

Othello, 1857—Mahadeo Shashtri Kolhatkar.
Thorale Madhorao 1861—Vinayak Janardan Kirtane'
Jayapal, 1863— Do
Manorama, 1871—Bapusaheb Bhajekar.
Vijaysingh, 1872—Kashinath Govind Natu.
Meghavati, 1863—Lakshman Gopal Dixit.
Himat Bahadur, 1868—Anand Sakharam Barve.

Leaving aside the mythological dramas of Vishnudas Bhave, Othello appears to be the first drama published and staged. This drama, however, is only a translation. The drama *Madhaorao Peshawe* written by Mr. Kirtane in 1861 can be said to be the first independent Marathi drama. This drama portrays the well known Peshawa Madhaorao. He was a very able Peshawa who when only 17 succeeded to the Gadi immediately after the disaster of Panipat. He came over all difficulties and in 1871 wiped out the disgrace of Panipat by defeating all the Mohamedan powers in the North. This drama is certainly a master-piece and it achieved great success on the stage.

So far we have said about the dramas. Now a word about dramatic companies. The first company was that of Vishnudas Bhave. The idea was picked up by many and shortly afterwards new companies were floated in towns around Sangli. As these companies toured in some parts of Maharashtra this new idea spread and soon a number of dramatic companies were formed in Poona, Bombay and other places. All these companies used to stage only mythological dramas and the nature of the performances was also similar. Later on, in addition to the main dramas some companies used to stage a small comedy. As said above, all these companies used to have only one curtain. In 1875 a Company from Kolhapur visited the Deccan

Hyderabad. There the proprietor had an opportunity of seeing drama staged by some Parsee Companies. Here he picked up the idea about curtains and got about 6 curtains made for his company, Thus curtains were introduced on the Marathi stage.

Ever since the beginning the Marathi writers wrote in poetry form. Literature which could not be easily understood was considered to be the best. Most of the early books in Marathi are written in poetry. Even saints like Ramdas and Tukaram could not go against this tradition, but fortunately the works of both them are written in simple language and can be understood even by an ordinary literate man. Such being the case the dramas written by Vishnudas Bhave and a few others published later had a number of poems. It was after the British rule that writers in Maharashtra realised the importance of literature in prose form. This naturally had its effects on the dramas also. It was Mr. Kirtane who first published a drama on the new lines. "Madhaorao Peshawe" is the name of this drama. As has been already stated this drama was well received on the stage, but this drama is also known as one which raised the standard of the dramas and consequently of the stage. Immediately afterwards Mr. Kirtane wrote another independant drama "Jaypal". This was also as good as the previous one. These dramas were staged by a Company known as

Ichalkaranjikar Natak Madali. Following Mr. Kirtane some more dramas, list of which is given below, were written by various authors. These dramas were a marked improvement on the previous mythological dramas of Vishnudas Bhave and others. These dramas naturally helped in improving the stage.

Bhrantikrit Chamatkar by Mr. Padhan,
Tara by Mr. Bishnu Moreshwar Mahajani,
Taruni Shikshan by Mr.Narayan Bapuji Knitkar,
Mor LL B., by Mr. Narayan Hari Bhagwat,
Manorama by Mr. Bapusaheb Bhajekar,
Vijaysingh by Mr' Kashinath Govind Natu,
Gunotkarsh by Mr. Vasudeo Women Khare,
Durga by Mr. Govind Ballal Deval,
Tratika by Mr. Wasudeo Balkrishna Kelkar,
Rana Bhimdeo by Mr. Shikhalkar & Modak
Manipatcha Durdaiwi Mohara by Mr. Mirat,

Of the above dramas special reference should be made of *Tara*, by Mr. Mahajani. This drama is a translation of Cymbeline. but it was very nicely written. The author had taken special care to see that the drama becomes a success not only as a literary piece but also is successful on the stage. The writer was crowned with success. This drama was staged by the same Company, Ichalkaranjikar Natak Mandali and the proprietors of this company requested Mr. Mahajani to write some more dramas on similar lines and consequently Mr. Mahajani wrote two more dramas "Mohwilasit and Wallā-

bhanunaya". Both these were successful. After Mr. Kirtane's drama, dramas by Mr. Mahajani proved to be transitional as they made a change for the better.

By about the year 1880 the stage attracted the attention of educated and learned people, and people who felt the necessity of developing the stage started taking active part in this and new dramatic companies were established for this purpose.

"Aryodharak Mandali" was floated some time in 1879/80 by three students of the Poona Engineering College, Mr. Deval, Mr. Patkar and Mr. Vamanrao Bhave, purely for the purpose of improving the Marathi stage. This was not a commercial concern. The aim of this institution was to develop the stage by introducing new ideas and whatever money was earned by the performances was utilised for the public welfare. This institution also published for sometime a periodical "Natyakatharnava" devoted to the cause drama and stage. "Othello" "King Lear" and "Tara" were the dramas these people used to stage and it is recorded that the performances were of the best type. The founders of this institution never used to take anything as remuneration and this was most unfortunate for Maharashtra, because these people had to earn money for livelihood and one by one all the three originators left the institution and with their exit the institution was also closed down. But an important

part was played by this institution. Mr. Bhave discovered the stage and the Ichalkaranjikar Natak Mandal with the help of men like Kirtane, Mahajani and others gave the Marathi stage a turn for the better and the Aryodharak Mandali made distinct improvements which were copied by others. The Shahunagarwasi Natak Mandali carried forward the work of the Aryodharak Mandali.

Shahunagarwasi Natak Mandali was in existence for about 25 years and during this long term it staged very fine dramas. The peculiarity of this Company was that it had a very good set of actors or rather the management was keen about first rate acting and this is why all the dramas staged by this Company were a success. The following are some of the dramas staged by this Companies ;

Commedies "Tratika" "Falgunrao" "Pranaya Vivah" and the like.

Historicals like "Panipatcha Mukabala" "Raha Bhimdeo" "Baji Deshapande" Tragedies like "Zunzarrao" "Hamlet" "Manajirao" and others like "Sant Tukaram" "Ramdas" etc.

As already mentioned all the dramas were a success but the drama "Tratika" as performed by this Company is still in the memory of the public. "Tratika" has been written by Prof. Kelkar on the lines of the "Taming of the Shrew" by Shakespeare.

Here mention must be made of some very good actors of this Company. Ganpatrao Joshi, Givindrao Supekar and Balwantrao Jog. Ganpatrao Joshi is still in the memory of the public. He was perhaps a genius and it is difficult to mention whether the success achieved by the Shahunagarwasi Natak Mandali was due to the type of dramas they were staging or whether it was due to the high class acting by its actors particularly by the three mentioned above and still more that of Mr. Joshi. As a matter of fact the drama *Tratikā* is literally not of a very high standard. It is an ordinary comedy. Still it achieved great popularity. Perhaps the conditions then prevailing in Maharastra gave this drama the popularity. Firstly the drama is a social one, then although this drama was of a social type it did not try to preach any type of social reforms nor was there anything in it which would injure the feelings ef the Sanatanists. The subject of the drama was beyond party politics. Then again the theme of the drama is very interesting. The heroine of the drama was like *Tratika* ; the hero purposely marries her and gradually tames her. Added to all these facts was the superb acting and that is why this drama was very popular.

The year 1880-81 is of great importance to the Marathi people. The late Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak started the publication of his well-known papers the *Kesari* and the *Maratha*. And in this

year a great change was brought about on the Marathi stage by the introduction of Music. Here again Poona scored a singular victory, because it was at Poona that tne first sangit-drama was staged by the well-known Annasaheb Kirloskar. Mention has already been made that the dramas by Vishnudas Bhave and few other writers of that time were mostly in of poetry but proper music was not there and that is why the public welcomed prose dramas written by Mr. Kirtane, Mahajani and others. But now that educated people had turned their attention towards the stage, there is no wonder that new reforms were introduced.

Annasaheb Kirloskar himself wrote the drama *Shakuntal* and its first performance took place on 31st October 1880 in the 'Anandodbhava Natak Griha' at Poona. Music, Acting, Singing and everything else was of high standard in this drama. The acting of Annasaheb himself was marvellous and the fame of Annasaheb and his drama soon reached every town in Maharashtra.

From his boyhood Annasaheb had inclination towards the stage. In his early days on the occasion of religious functions Mr. Kirloskar used to stage dramas with the help of his friends. In the first years of his life Mr. Kirloskar was staying in Belgaum and had an opportunity of seeing Kanarese dramas. For service he had to go to Bombay and there he saw dramatic performance by Parsee Com-

panies. His natural inclination was towards drama. It is said that Mr. Kirloskar was a school teacher in Belgaum. Belgaum being a comparatively big town some dramatic company used to be there and Mr. Kirloskar was always to be found there. He did not care for service also. At times he used to entrust the class to a brilliant student and himself sleep in the office room. At times he did not care to attend the school also. He later joined the Police department but soon realised that the Police department was not suitable for an honest man and he left that job too. Fortunately a very high officer of the revenue department was at that time in Belgaum. He offered Mr. Kirloskar a good job in his department and took him to Bombay. This was fortunate for the people of Maharashtra, because in that town there were ample opportunities for his ideas ragarding the stage to develop. Thus when in service Mr. Kirloskar started a dramatic Company. The first performance of this Company took place at Poona.

So many things put together have contributed to the success of the dramas of Mr. Kirloskar.

Firstly he introduced scientific music on the stage which was a new thing. Secondly, before this, whatever songs there were in the dramas, these were sung only by the Sutradhar. But in Mr. Kirloskar's dramas every actor had to sing his song and at the appropriate time, Then Mr.Kirloskar introduced some reforms on the stage. He was himself a writer,

actor and good singer. He used to choose his own actors, and when writing the dramas he had in his mind his actors and wrote the dramas in such a way as would suit the respective actors. His first drama is *Shakuntala*, and amongst his first set of actors were Morobo Waghulikar, Muzumdar, and Natekr. The second named person, Mr. Muzumdar was a female actor (about him we will write later) but he could not sing and therefore at first Mr. Kirloskar did not have any songs for the heroine of his drama *Shakuntala*. As every actor got job suitable to him it added considerably to the success of the drama. Immediately afterwards Mr. Kirlosker got Mr. Bhaurav Kolhatkar for the female role, and this added considerably to the success of his dramas. Bhaurav was a good singer and had sweet voice. He was beautiful looking and was quite suitable for the female role. He was the *Shakuntala* of Mr. Kirloskar. He is still in the memory of the Marathi people. Mr. Kirloskar started his dramatic activities seriously in 1880 and died in the year 1885. In this five years' time he wrote two complete dramas and one incomplete drama. *Shakuntala* was his first drama, *Subhadra* was second and *Ramrajyaviyog* the unfinished and last drama.* But in the small period of five years with the aid of his actors and particularly that of

* Besides these dramas, his Sankara-Digbijaya (1873) deserves mention. Another drama on Allauddin is said to have been staged by Samgham Dramatic Company.

Bhaurao Kolhatkar Mr. Kirloskar brought about a number of changes on the Marathi stage and the improvements made by him developed the Marathi stage considerably. In those five years and years afterwards, Mr. Kirloskar, his dramas and his actors, particularly Mr. Bhaurao Kolhatkar were on everybody's tongue. Uufortunately for Maharashtra Mr. Karloskar died too early. But it is perhaps a sort of curse to Maharashtra that first rate people in every sphere are cut off rather early. Out of the seven Peshawas, six died too early, before they reached the age of 40. All were able rulers. Had they lived to rule for some more years, perhaps Indian history would have been different. When Kirloskar died in 1885 of Diabetes, the whole of Maharastra lamented his death.

Mr. Trilokekar (1835-1908) wrote two dramas *Harischandra* (1880) and *Damayanti* in 1879 and had them staged by one *Hindusanmargbodhak Natak Mandali.* The dramas were certainly of reformed type and were a marked improvement on the previous dramas but they did not however achieve the fame that Mr. Kirloskar, his dramas, his actors and his dramatic performances achieved. Whilst Mr. Kirloskar is still known to everybody in Maharashtra, Mr. Trilokekar and his dramas are in the memory of comparatively few people. His *Sangit Sabitri Natak* was written after Kirloskar's *Sakuntala.*

Mr. Kirloskar died in 1885. He introduced new types of dramas, new techniqne and created a turning point in the history of the Marathi stage. With him really the modern history of the Marathi stage commences. Here a review of the stages through which the Marathi Stage passed will not be out of place. We have seen that in 1843 the first Marathi drama was staged. At that time there used to be only one curtain. Scenes and sceneries were not conceived of. After a few years there was an increase in the number of curtains. The nature of the dramas itself had also undergone various changes. The earliest dramas were mythological and there were in them a number of poems but no real music. Later prose-dramas came into prominence when Mr. Kirloskar gave quite a new but a very good turn. He not only introduced perfect music on the stage and made every actor sing his songs, but also introduced on the stage scenes and sceneries and although with his death the Marathi stage got a temporary set back, the people had got the idea which only required to be developed and this task was done by several persons and the present Marathi stage is only an improved and up-to-date form of stage as introduced by Mr. Kirloskar.

Although due to the dramas of Mr. Kirloskar the Marathi public developed a taste for Sangit drama, prose dramas also were gaining popularity. To Mr. Dewal Maharashtra is highly indebted because

somebody was required to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Mr. Kirloskar, and Mr. Dewal not only carried forward the task of Mr. Kirloskar in respect of Sangit Dramas but gave an impetus to the prose dramas as well.. We have already made mention of the Shahunagarwasi Natak Mandali which dramatic company used to stage only prose dramas. Mr. Dewal wrote a very good drāma *Durga* which this company took up for staging. The Drama *Durga* was highly appreciated by the public. There was another drama *Gunotkarsh* written by Mr. Khare which also was staged by this Company. The credit for bringing out these dramas goes to Mr. Candy. Mr. Candy was an educated man and was the principal of the Rajaram College of Kolhapur. He had great regard for his institution, his staff and his students and every year he used to have a good drama staged by his students. In the year 1885 he advertised through papers a prize of Rs. 150 for a good Marathi drama. For this purpose Mr. Khare wrote *Gunotkarsa*, and Mr. Dewal wrote *Durga*. Although on the historical merit of the subject of the drama, Mr. Khare won the first prize, *Durga* (1886) got public notoriety and the second prize.

By this time some more dramatic companies were floated in Maharashtra, e.g. Dongre* Natak Mandali, Waikar Natak Mandali, Natyanand Natak

* Dongre was writer of some dramas *Sangit Sakuntal* (1880), *Sangit Ratnobali*, *Santgi Mrcchakatik etc.*

Mandali. All these companies were staging the drammas staged by the Kirloskar Natak. Mandali, Kirloskar Natak Mandali was also in existence but it had not that popularity which it enjoyed during the life time of Mr. Kirloskar. All the above companies had compartively short life. We have seen that at the time of Mr. Kirloskar there were in the Kirloskar Natak Mandali very good actors like Mr. Natekar, Mr. Waghulikar and Mr. Kolhatkar, but the first two left the company after the death of Mr. Kirloskar and Mr. Kolhatkar was managing the show singly. Mr. Kolhatkar got some actors from some of the above named companies but the Company was always in need of a man who was a good actor, good director and good writer and Mr. Dewal fulfilled this want. With the co-operation and help of Mr. Dewal the Kirloskar Natak Mandali again came to the fore-front. For this Company Mr. Dewal wrote several sangit dramas. His first two dramas were translated from Sanskrit dramas of the same name, viz, the Mrichhakatik 1887 and Vikramorshiyam 1889. He, however, put suitable and good songs in these dramas. Of these two, Vikramorshiyam was not so popular but Mrichhakatik was and is still very popular. Some dramatic companies still stage this drama and people even now highly appreciate it. His third drama is Shapsambhram 1893. This drama is based on the well-known Sanskrit writer Bana's "Kadam-

bari", Mr. Dewal's last drama is "Sharada" 1899. This drama has left and will continue to keep Mr. Dewal in memory of all and for ever. The story of this drama is very simple. It shows how for love of money a father makes up his mind to give his daughter aged about 14 to a rich man above 70. How for the sake of money brokers try and find out young brides for aged men. This drama also shows how young and sincere men can frustrate the efforts of persons with evil designs. The songs in this drama are even today muttered by all old and young, and some of the figures in this drama have become proverbial. How far it is true no body can say, but it is said that Mr. Dewal got the idea of this drama from the efforts made by a very old chief of a small state in Maharashtra for marrying a young girl because he had no issue. With Mr, Dewal the Kirloskar Natak Mandali served the Marathi public for some time and made considerable improvements in the stage but after Mr. Dewal and Mr. Bhaurao Kolhatkar this company did not live long. Again there was the need of a person who would not only serve the Marathi public but will also make improvements on the Marathi stage, but fortunately Maharashtra had not had to wait long.

In the meantime the drama and the stage had become so popular in Maharashtra that people in almost every big town wished that there should be a

dramatic performance in their town. For this demand there was ample supply also, because by this time, many new dramatic companies came into existence, and in each there was an outstanding actor whose name is still in the memory of the Marathi public "Natyakalaprasarak" "Natyakala Pravartak" "Lalitkala darsh" "Balwant Sangit" "Yeshwant Sangit" "Rangbodhechhu" "Aanand Vilas" "Nutan Sangit" "Mahatashtra Natak Mandali" But none of these companies had the fortune of carrying forward the task of the Kirloskar Natak Mandali. But soon a Company was floated by some of the ex-actors of the Kirloskar Co, Mr. Rajhansa (known as Bal Gandharva) Mr. Tambe and Mr. Bodas and a few others formed a company known as Gandharva Natak Mandali. This Company had a very good set of actors and had fortunately the backing of well known writers of Maharashtra. This Company became popular very soon because of its best acting and settings. Ample money was spent by this company for scene and scenery and special efforts were made to see that acting and music were of the highest type. Bal Gandharva was the chief person in this Company and he used to do the female part. His acting in the female role was perfect. Public was mad after him and for some time his dress on the stage was copied by the ladies of Maharashtra. His Highness Sayajirao Gaikwar of Baroda was very much fond

of the dramas of this Company and particularly the acting of Gandharva and for ever this company had every support from this prince. Besides the dramas staged by the Kirloskar Natak Mandali, this Company till lately used to stage the dramas of well known writers like the late Mr. Kolhatkar, the late Mr. Gadkari, Mr. Khadilkar and others. Particular mention is made of these three writers because it was on account of the dramas of these three writers that the Gandharva Natak Mandali could gain popularity. As mentioned above, Gandharva Natak Mandali made considerable improvements in the Marathi stage and brought it to the level of noted Stages of other provinces. It is enough to mention that for the settings, scenes, dresses etc, for one drama only, this company spent about one lac of rupees. Although Mr. Rajhansa alias Bal Gandharva is still living, he is too old to take female parts now, and therefore the company is not enjoying its previous popularity, but it cannot be denied that it is Bal Gandharva and his company that has raised the standard of the Marathi stage very high.

With the advent of the talkies, the Marathi Stage is fading away. The reasons for this are obvious. Comparatively Cinema is less expensive for the public. Further, Cinema can show each and everything. It can show running trains, steamers, flying aeroplanes, actual scenes of places of historical importance to the public. If a particular scene is

that of a market-place, busy road, moving train or ship, the public have to take it for granted that the road, market place, train or the ship is there. The Cinema actually shows these things. In short cinema is more realistic than drama. As a business also cinema proves less costly. Once the producers bring out a picture, they can take out so many copies and run them simultaneously at so many places. Such is not the case with drama. One dramatic Company can have only one or at the most two shows a day. Dramatic companies are at the mercy of their good and popular actors. These men have to be kept satisfied and for this, they must pay them handsomely. Such is not the case with the film-producers. Once the pictures are out they need not bother about the actors in it. Comparatively Cinema shows are short time entertainments and the public do not feel tired. With this in view, some companies have been started of late in Maharashtra with new type of dramas which could be performed in 2 or 2½ hours. "Natya Manwantar Limited" is one of such companies, but these efforts were also not successful and it must be admitted that for the present at least, the Cinema has almost wiped out the Stage in Maharashtra.

We have thus seen that Mr. Vishnudas Bhave founded the Stage in Maharashtra, and it was gradually developed by Mr. Kirloskar and Bal Gandharva.

But for one or two exceptions, ladies never

appeared on the stage in Maharashtra. Young and beautiful-looking men had to do the female parts. The main reason for this is that in Maharashtra the actor is rather looked down. Boys from high families were never allowed to join a dramatic company. The dramatic companies had therefore to include in their staff illiterate people and such boys as would run away from their homes. Although the Marathi public appreciated and patronised the dramas, the dramatic companies were considered a vicous circle. To a considerable extent this view is correct. The environment in a dramatic company is such that a new-comer, howsoever sober he may be, he soon gets bad habits. Smoking is the first step. Others follow soon. Because generally illiterate people are in the dramatic companies, the environment is bad, and because the environment is bad, good people hesitate to go there. Such being the case, educated boys and boys from high families could not be allowed to join the dramatic companies, and the question of ladies joining the stage was not at all conceived of. In some provinces, particularly in Bengal, women from quartes of ill fame are admitted on the stage but in Maharashtra, the proprietors of the dramatic companies never encouraged this and hence males had to take the female part as well. In Bengal of course this experiment has been very successful not only from cultural but also from social point of view.

Now we will turn to writers of Marathi drama.

The first Marathi drama writer is Vyankoji (Shahu) the Marathi ruler of Tanjore. He wrote in 1682 the first Marathi drama *Lakshmi Narayan Kalyan.* Then till 1843 no effort was made for writing or staging a drama and Vishnudas Bhave wrote some mythological dramas. Mr. Kirtane changed the tradition and wrote two good independent dramas *Madhaorao Peshawe* and *Jayapal.* Mention has already been made of other writers like Mr. Godbole, Mr. Rajwade Mr. Lele and others but of all these the dramas of Mr. Kirtane are of high standard. Mr. Mahajani wrote three good dramas like TARA, MOHAVILASIT and VALIABHANUNAYA. Mr. Kirloskar wrote three dramas about this time Mr. Khare wrote *Gunotkarsh* and Mr. Dewal wrote some four dramas mention of which has already been made. From 1843 till about the year 1890, about two hundred dramas were written in Marathi. The list will be too lengthy to be published here. Mention of important dramas and writers has already been made above. Some of the dramas were translated from Sanskrit and English dramas, some were historical, some were mythological, some social and some independent.

We will now deal with the writers after the periods of 1890 :

Well-known modern Marathi dramatists are Mr. N. C. Kelkar, Mr. Kolhatkar, Mr. Khadilkar,

Mr. Gadkari, Mr. Madhaorao Joshi, Mr. Varerkar, Mr. Tipnis, Mr. Atre, Vir Vinayakrao Savarkar, Mrs. Girijabai Kelkar, and few others. Mr. N. C. Kelkar is the well known leader of Maharashtra. After the late Lokamanya Tilak he became the leader of Maharashtra. There is not a single sphere of literature which Mr. Kelkar has not explored. In Maharashtra he is the best essayist, best Novelist, best writer on political and economical subjects, Mr. Kelkar has published books on every subject and all these books are considered as standard. Dramas he wrote very few, but the few dramas he has written are considered to be the best pieces of literature.

The late Mr. Kolhatkar is known as the best writer of Maharashtra. Although he is so acknowledged, his dramas have not earned very much popularity. Mr. Khadilkar has earned the fame as Natyacharya and rightly deserves to be so called. He started writing dramas ever since the beginning of this century and it is only recently that due to age he has given this up. He has written quite a number of dramas most of which are staged by the Gandarva Natak Mandali. His prose dramas are staged by the Maharashtra Natak Mandali. Most of his dramas are mythological, one or two social one or two historical. His drama *Manapaman* earned for him great name. His drama *Kichak Vadh* was written sometime in 1907 just about the

time when political movement was at full swing in Maharashtra. Sedition was suspected at that time by the Government everywhere. Lord Curzon had just then left India, public feeling was against him and in this drama *Kichak Vadh*, Government suspected that Lord Curzon has been portrayed. The drama was therefore immediately proscribed. This drama although prose, became very popular all over Maharashtra. The story is about the Pandavas residing in Viratnagari in disguise during the last year of their Vanvas (exile). Kichak the Commander-in-Chief, was virtually the ruler and molested Draupadi who was then known as Sairandhri. Ultimately Kichak was killed by Bhim. The following extract from the "Times of India" commenting on the drama is self-explanatory.

"Although his name is no-where uttered on the stage or mentioned in the printed play, every one in the theatre knows that Kichak is really intended to be Lord Curzon, that Draupadi is India and that Yudhishtir is the Moderate, and Bhim the Extremist party. Every now and again unmistakable clues are provided. The question indeed admits no doubt, for since the play first appeared in 1907 the whole of Deccan has been blazoning for the identity of the characters. Once they have been recognised, the inner meaning of the play becomes clear. A weak Government at Home represented by King Virat has given the Viceroy a free hand. He has made use of it to insult and humiliate

> India. Of the two champions, the moderates advocate gentle that is constitutional measures. The extremists out of the deference to the older party agree, although satisfied of the inffectiveness. Waiting until this has been demonstrated, they then adopt violent methods and everything becomes easy. The oppressor is disposed of without difficulty."

Next may be mentioned the name of Mr. Ram Ganes Gadkari (1885-1919) whose death Maharashtra mourns even to-day. He wrote six dramas, out of which five are ever-green. Every literate person in Maharashtra must have several times read the dramas by Mr. Gadkari and feels like reading them again. All his dramas are successful on the stage and the subject matter of his dramas is suitable for any time. His social dramas are very touching. One drama advocates widow-marriage.* Another drama tells the importance of chastity of the ladies† in Aryavarta (India). In one of his dramas he shows how a man starts taking wine with only one glass ‡ and loses not only his career but everything. This drama is staged by the Gandharva Natak Mandali and the audience actually sheds tears when seeing the performance. In his drama *Rajasannyās* which is a historical one, he has advocated the principle "that a King is a trustee of the kingdom. He should

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* *Premasannyas* (renunciation of love).

† *Punya Prabhāv*

‡ *Ekac pyālā*(only a single glass).

not spend the public money for personal enjoyments". The drama pictures the last days of Sambhaji, son of Shivaji. Sambhaji was a worthless ruler, full of vices and he had nearly lost the kingdom established by his father Shivaji. He was captured by Aurangjeb. In prison he repents for his past deeds and decides to die by refusing to embrace Islam which was offered to him along with a big kingdom within the Moghul Empire. He sent a word to his brother, that he has decided to die which would create inspiration amongst the Marahtas and it really so hapened. Mr. G. C. Bhate in his *Modern Marathi Literature* says in p. 413 : "This drama is incomplete but if completed would have been a tragedy, emulating Shakespeare's *Antony* and *Cleopatra.*" Although Sambhaji was killed, Aurangabe could not destroy the Marathi Empire. Unfortunately for Maharashtra, Mr. Gadkari so gifted a poet and dramatist died when only 33. Had he lived a few years more, Maharashtra would have got a number of other good dramas. Even to-day there is no body to fill in the gap created by Mr. Gadkari's death. Vir Savarkar the well-known president of the Hindu Mahasabha, wrote about 3 or 4 dramas. One of his dramas is *Sanyast Khadg*. It portrays conditions prevailing at the time of Lord Budha and shows how Ahimsa practised to the very word of it is absurd. All his dramas are written in beautiful language. Unfortunately Mr, Savarkar

had to spend the best part of his life in Andamans and that is why India had so long lost a good leader and Maharashtra a good and powerful writer.

Mr. Madhaorao Joshi wrote some dramas but his drama *Sthanik Swarajya* has obtained wide popularity. It shows how powers given to Municipal Councillors are misused. Although this drama is written in Marathi, it is applicable to all parts of India. Mr. Atre in the beginning wrote good dramas. His early dramas were parodies and they were received well by the public but the success of his first two dramas instead of leading the writer to a higher stage has taken him down and his later dramas may simply be called farces. Mr. Varerkar propularly known as Mama Varerkar has written good dramas. He wrote a drama *Hach Mulacha Bap* in 1917 criticising the dowry system. Some time ago Snehalata, a girl from Bengal, committed suicide, because her father was not in a position to give her away in marriage because he could not give dowry. In Maharashtra deep sympathy was felt for Snehalata and the drama is an out-come of Maharastra's feeling for Bengal.* *Satteche Gulam* is one of the darmas by this writer. In this is shown how rich families are reduced to nothing when they approach the courts of law for justice.

*In Bengal Girish Chandra's *Balidan*, the grim social tragedy on dowry-system has created a great sensation since 1905.

The legal profession has here been rightly criticised as was done by Giris Chandra in *Mayabashan* in 1897.

Mr. Tipnis is known for writing Historical dramas.

Mrs. Girijabai Kelkar's writings are realistic. Young boys and girls can learn much from her writings. In reply to a drama *Bayakanch Band* (Revolt of the ladies) Mrs. Kelkar has written *Purushanche Band* 1913 (Revolt of the males) which is a very fitting reply. Her *Ayesā Natak* (1921) is also worthy of mention.

Prof. Phadake also has written about 3 or 4 dramas. There are various other dramatists as Mr. Yeshawantrao Joshi, Mr. Bhole, Mr. Vartak, Mr. Phatak, Mr. Karkhanis, Mr. Gurjar, Mr. Bedekar, Vir Vamanrao Joshi and others. Full figures are not to hand but by the year 1917 there were about 900 dramas in Marathi and from 1924 to 1934 a period of ten years about 300 dramas were written. Of late comparatively less dramas are being written but this is due to the fact that owing to the popularity of Cinema-shows, the stage is not so popular today ; and because there is no demand from the stage, writers also do not feel inclined to write dramas.

Efforts are being made to compete the Cinema with Natikas. Natika means small drama. The time required to perform these on the stage is not

more than 2 and 1/2 to 3 hours. These Natikas have kept the Marathi stage alive. A company known as "Natyamanwantar Limited" used to stage only 2 or 3 Natikas like "Andhalyanchi Shala" and "Lapandava" written by Mr. Vartak. Both Mr. and Mrs. Vartak used to act on the stage, assisted by well-known actors and actresses like Mr. Keshaorao Date and Mr. Jyotsna Bhole. These Natikas were very popular for some time. The Natikas have however not been able to successfully compete the Cinema.

In the preceding pages mention has already been made of well-known actors like Mr. Ganpatrao Joshi, Mr. Bhaurao Kolhatkar, Mr. Kirloskar, Mr. Natekar, Mr. Dewal Mr. Gurao, Mr. Gore, Mr, Rajhansa alias Bal Gandharva, Mr. Bodas, and others. Besides these there have been some more good actors like Mr. Keshaorao Bhosale who had a dramatic company by name Lalit Kaladarsha. In his early days he was the best female actor and later he used to take male part. Unfortunately there was never a team work of actors. Whenever an actor thought that he was successful and had earned sufficient fame he used to form his own company. This really deprived the Marathi public of the pleasure of seeing dramas performed jointly by good actors. In their own interest if the good actors came together, they would have not only earned fame but also money. In the year 1921 a drama was performed in Bombay in aid of the

Tilak Swrajya fund. In this all good actors took part. Particular mention must be made of Mr. Bhosale and Mr. Rajhansa (Bal Gandharva). As a performance the drama was no doubt a success but many thousands of rupees were collected. After Mr. Bhosale, Mr. Pendharkar was owner of the Lalitkaladarsh Natak Mandali. He was a very good actor and his singing also was very good. Mr. Govindrao Tembe was successful on the stage. He used to act with Bal Gandharva. His songs were highly appreciated by the public. Mr. Tembe became equally successful on the screen. Another actor who is successful both on the stage and on the screen is Mr. Keshaorao Date. Mr. Bhate owner of the Natyakala Pravartak Mandali proved to be successful both as a female and male actor. There are some good actors still remaining unnoticed owing to our insufficient knowledge for which we regret very much. We will do so in our next edition if in the meantime we know about them.

Till the advent of 'talkies' the stage was very popular and as in other parts of India, so in Maharashtra, the talkies have given a set back to the stage. A word about the film industry in Maharashtra will, therefore, be not out of place here.

We have seen that till 1843 there were no dramas in Maharashtra. Reasons for this are various which have been explained early in this

chapter. But Maharashtra is proud to be the pioneer of Film industry in India. Mr. Phalake produced some time in 1913 the first film in India and while writing the history of Indian Film Industry Mr. Phalake deserves to be referred to with respect. Mr. Phalake not only introduced the film industry in India but developed it considerably. In the beginning, for scenes he used painted curtains but later made surprisng improvements. His pictures were well known all over India and were released mostly by the Kohinoor Film Co. It is creditable to the Marathi people that they have maintaned the tradition of Mr, Phalake. It was the Prabhat Film Company of Poona that brought out the first successful talkie *Harischandra.* Prior to this some two or three talkies were produced but they proved a failure because sound and acting were not clear. Prabhat Film Company kept its glorious tradition for a long time and till 1940 produced pictures which not only were highly popular all over India but their pictures successively won for them the first prize at the International Exhibition. With due respect to other producers in India it must be said that Bombay still leads in the film Industry. Due to the comparatively small number of Marathi speaking people all companies in Maharashtra produce pictures in Hindi and a few only in Marathi. Commercially Marathi pictures do not prove a success. In Calcutta there are so many

theatres that screen only Bengali talkies* whereas in Bombay there are only one or two first rate theatres that screen Marathi pictures. Now for commercial gain even producers in Bengal have to produce Hindi pictures. The success of Hindi picture is due to the fact that more than 12 crores of people in India have Hindi as their mother tongue. Besides a majority of people of other provinces can understand Hindi, and that is why Hindi pictures prove profitable. Yet Marathi people should keep content with the fact that at least some Marathi talkies are produced every year but Gujrati talkies are still very scanty. The Gujratis and Parsis (whose mother tongue is Gujrati) are commercially to the forefront but except for one or two there are no talkies in Gujrati. There are so many Gujrati producers in Bombay, but they produce pictures in Hindi only.

The success of a film depends upon the ability of the director. Artists no doubt deserve some credit but only actors and actresses however good they are cannot bring out first class films. A good director, however, with any type of 'star' can produce a good picture. Here also Maharashtra stands first. Director Shantaram is the acknowledged best director in India. He has proved. that he can pick up a man in the street and make him a star overnight. Mr. Chandra

* About Bengali talkies we shall give some idea in our next volume.

Mohan, Miss Shanta Apte, and Mrs. Khote owe their fame to Shantaram. Before Shantaram included her in his cast for *Amrit Manthan*,Shanta Apte was not a success but her acting in that picture as also in subsequent ones like *Amar Jyoti*, *Rajput Ramni*, *Duniya-na-mane* directed by Shantaram proved much better than the previous one. Her acting in these pictures as compared with her acting in her recent picture *Dohai* will prove that without a proper director an actor or an actress can not be successful. Master Vinayak, Baburao Pendharkar, Damuanna Malvankar, Keshaorao Date, Jog, Salvi, Shahu Modak, are some of the well known Marathi film actors and Mrs. Durgabai Khote, Miss Shanta Apte, Meenaxi, Mrs Leela Chitnis, Mrs. Vanmala, Mrs Shobhana Samartha, Miss Deshapande are some of the noted actresses of Maharashtra. Mention must separately be made of Mr. K. Narayan Kale, who is not only a good actor, but a good Director and writer too.

Whether respectable ladies should join the film industry or not, is still a controversial issue in Maharashtra. As a matter of fact undue importance has been given to this issue. Amongst those who advocate that respectable ladies should act in films are mostly irresponsible people who are not credited with a clear vision. Ladies joining the film industry think at first that they are going there for improving the art but really speaking most of them

join the film either for money or for pleasures. In this respect Miss Shanta Apte deserves to be paid a high tribute for her independent views and thoughtful writings. She has written in Marathi a few books on the film industry · and in one of these books she has in unambiguous terms stated that respectable ladies should not join the film industry. In support of her statement she has given ample reasons and men of contrary views and girls desirous of joining the film, are requested to read this book by Miss Shanta Apte, first, before making their choice. It has been brought to our notice that some ladies from high and respectable families joined the film not for money but "for the cultivation of art" but later started signing contracts with any company who could offer them more money. Besides often times they forget themselves, and 'art' proves only an excuse.

We have given in the foregoing pages a short history of the rise, growth and development of the Marathi stage. Efforts were made to secure the best and most accurate informations both as to dramas as well as artists, and if there be any corrections or additions suggested, they will be considered when publishing the next edition of this book.*

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* In the preparation of this chapter, I have been considerably assisted by Mr. V. B. Chitale of the Metal Box Company, Calcutta, who has taken Herculean pains to collect and solder facts for this history. He was since corrected the date of the first drama as 1682 and not 1662 (*vide* page 194.)

Chapter IX

SANSKRIT DRAMAS.

We have spoken of Bhāsa, Kālidāsa, Rupa Goswami and others in our First Volume. We propose to deal with the Sanskrit Stage and the efforts of the "Sanskrit Sahitya Parishad" in the next volume. Let us mention incidentally some dramas of the last century here.

In the years 1889—1899, the following Sanskrit dramas composed by Kaviraj Nritya Gopal Kabiratna and others were staged:

1. *Shāpābashān*, 2. *Rāmābadān* 3. *Darpashātan* (those being composed by him), 4. *Koumadi Sudhakar*, 5. *Veni Samhar*, 6. *Mrichhkatic* 7. *Chandakoushik*.

In 1895, Professors and Students of the Harihar Sanskrit College, Kotalipara (Faridpur) staged *Sakuntalā* very successfully, so much so that Mr. K. C. De, M.A., I.C.S., District Magistrate invited the troupe during the Mela at Faridpur and about 5000 people were enchanted to see the performance. Pandit Gopal Chandra Kabyatirtha represented Sakuntala, Baman Choudhry Raja, Radharaman Vidyabhuson Kanwa, Ananga Mohan Kabyatirtha Vidushaka. Pandit Ambica Charan Sahityacharyya (Head Pandit Arya Vidyalaya) had also a part. Details will follow in the next volume.*

* Pandit Ashokenath Sastri, M.A., P.R.S. Vedāntatirtha has supplied the author with these facts.

Chapter X

THE CLASSIC THEATRE

About the time Girish Chandra left the Minerva Theatre in March 1896, a new star was in the ascendant who dominated the Bengali stage for some time. He was born of a wealthy family of Calcutta distinguished alike for social status as well as culture. He was young and handsome and possessed a stage-suiting appearance. He was energitic and his manners were captivating. Thus when he started the Theatre while only 20, he got a good start.

A few years ago before he had to come to the public theatre, Dani Babu, and Chuni Babu wtth a few friends formed the Indian Dramatic Club,* and Amarendranath joined them in 1893-94. A performance was soon organised in the Corinthian Stage where in the play of *Battle of Plassy*, Dani Babu took the part of Clive, Chuni Babu of Mohonlal and Jagat Shette and Amarendra Babu as Seraj with Tarasundari as Britannia. This was repeated on the Minerva Stage also within a few months.

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* As early as 1888, they showed the performance of *Laksman Barjan* with Gangadhar Babu, afterwards Swami Akhandanand of Belur Math, as Brahmā.

Amarendranath's love of literature brought him into contact with Girish Chandra very soon. In 1895 he started a monthly magazine of "Sourabba." At his insistence Girish lent his name as editor and published some poems of the actresses Binodini and Tarasundari with this prefatory remark—"Destined to build and improve the Stage, I donot know what my position in society is. Artists, however, are my children. Their merits should not therefore go unrecognised, and thus for their encouragement, I am publishing these two poems". It is the same time when Mr. Dutt lent him the services of Tara Sundari for a day to play the part of Karameti Bai during Tincowrie's absence, (vide page 132).

At the time when Amarendra played the part of Seraj at the Minerva, the poet Nabin Chandra himself was present at the performance with Girish by his side. The poet warmly praised Amarendra's talents and gave encouragement to the young artist.

Towards the close of 1896, Chuni Babu suggested the name of Amarendra as an artist for the Minerva, but the idea was not approved of by others. His zeal for Theatre however remained unabated. In 1897, when the City Theatre was showing the performance of *Devi Choudhurani* before an enthusiastic audience, Amarendranath look lease of the Emerald Stage and started his "The Classic Theatre". The monthly rent was fixed at Rs. 250, but an

advance of Rs, 1200. was to be paid. It is said, that Babu Gopal Lal Seal, a friend to the brother of Amarendra, did not like so young a man to come within the theatre-atmosphere, but through the persuasion of Mr. Shyamadhob Roy, Police Magistrate, Sealdah, he yielded to the proposal at last.

On the Good Friday evening of 1897, Amarendranath opened the Classic (16th April), with Girish's *Nala Damoyanti* and *Bellick Bazar*. Amarendranath took the parts of Nala and Dukari Sen, Tara Sundari of Damayanti and Aghore Pathok that of Kali.

On the 17th April *Battle of Plassy* was staged with *Laksman Barjan* and on 18th, *Daksha Jajna* and *Bellick Bazar* with Mr. Dutt as Shiva, Tara Sundari as Sati and Mr. Pathok as Daksha. Chuni Babu and Nikhil Babu were here for two days only.

Daksha Jajna and *Tarubala* were staged on the next week and on the third Girish Chandra's *Hārānidhi* was put on boards with Babu Mohendra Bose (who lately joined) as Harish and Amar Babu as Aghore in which the latter did his part well and was considered the next best to Bel Babu. Mahendra Babu as Harish also got better of his rival at the Star. Yet the sales were bad.

Amarendranath then commenced *Devi Choudhurani* and although he did very well as Brojeswar

especially in the love-scenes, Bhabani Pathok* was no match for the original—Nilmadhab Babu—of City, nor Haraballav for Chandi Babu (the original).

Although the above pieces could not create any impression, *Hari Raj* however did. It was written by Nagen Choudhry and staged on the 21st June 1897 in this theatre on the date of Golden Jubilee of Her Majesty, Queen Victoria. The drama was acted well and audience how began to come and we have from the authority of the opera-master Mr. Purno Chandra Ghose who said "Here we first saw the face of a Shaw (a hundred)," The cast was as follows :—

Amarendra	...	Hariraj
Chhotorani	...	Sreelekha
Tara Sundari	...	Aruna
Montu Babu	...	Joyakar

It may be worthy of mention that before Amarendra Nath commenced performing Hariraj, it was being shown in private houses on contract basis by the Victoria Dramatic Club of which Kabirj Chandra Kumar Sen was the head. As the club fell into adversity, the Kabiraj helped Amar Babu with dresses and artists of his company. Thus was Montu Babu made to play the part, although it was selected before for Hari Bhusan Babu.

Besides the above, *Bilwamangal, Buddha, Raja*

* Pandit Hari Bhusan and Mr. Akshoy Chakraborty respectively.

O Rani etc. were also staged, but with all attempts the theatre could not thrive. Added to this, Tara Sundari also left for the Star.*

But at last came a chance when fortune began to smile upon Amar Babu, with the opera of *Alibaba* put on the boards.

When this piece was selected, both Amar Babu and its writer Babu Kshirode Prasad Vidyabinode saw Girish Chandra who was then working for the Star. *Alibaba* was now put into his hands with request to make it attractive and fit for the stage. Girish Chandra, too, made some changes and introduced necessary songs in it. It was staged on the 20th November 1897 and unexpected success was achieved in the performance. People began to flock and sales shortly rose up from Rs. 200 to Rs. 1,500. Amarendra felt confident of success now, and confidence gave him strength.

Condition of the Bengali Stage was now below normal. Girish was practically not working any where, Minerva was on the verge of collopse, the Emerald had already been closed, the Bengal was approaching its decline, ephemerial Beena and City had already been wiped out of existence and the Star under the stoic rule of the disciplinarians Amrita Bose and Amrita Mitra was turned into

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* She played there as Annapurna (*Mayabashan*) and Saibya in *Harish Chandra*.

a school of good boys only. For fops and dandies there was little joy. No smoking, no ejaculation of delight, no throwing of wreaths on artists was allowed here, and a general craving for a change of something new was now felt by some and when the new came, it was enthusiastically welcomed by the audience.

Now about *Alibaba*—the duets of Abdala and Marjina as represented by Nripen Bose and Kusum Kumari were very enjoyable but the charming songs and captivating dances from the stage, the encores, and roars of praises from the auditarium established for a time unity between the two. Within a short time the theatre grew to be a place of wild *Bacchanalia*, latitude being given to the audience for free expressions of any kind of observations. Discipline was thrown to the wind and the atmosphere became foul. Theatre that was raised by Girish into an institution of public instructions and innocent pleasure now became the rendezvous of pleasure-loving people and brought light-heartedness to the students' community. *Alibaba* was greatly responsible for this and the condition became so disheartening to real lovers of art that Babu Amritalal Bose wrote a long letter to Girish to help his Stage from coming to this stage, but it was too late. Girish did not like farces as *Tajjab Byapar* and *Babu* as well and traced the origin of the deterioration of tastes from there.

We may tell the non-Bengali readers that as the great Bankim Chandra always tried to preserve a dignified atmosphere of sublimity and purity in the domain of Bengali literature, avoiding anything vulgar or low, so did Girish work for the same ideal for the Indian stage. Neither did Bankim nor Girish indulge in any personalities, and their writings are absolutely free from all personal spite. It is for this reason Bankim Chandra asked his friend Dinobondhu Mitter to stop publishing *Sadhabar Ekadashi* & *Bie Pāglā Budo*, although both were priceless from other points of view; and it is for this reason, Girish's farces and operas contain no personal attacks, and himself also did not like the attacks on personalities, in the farces of his disciple Amritalal, inspite of the fact those too have done great good to the Hindu Society. But neither of the two, Bankim or Girish, was listened to. So Girish on receipt of Amritalal's lettter, instead of giving a sympathetic reply referred now to his bitter experiences. Amarendranath thus carried on his programme and became the observed of all observers now. But as to what changes were brought about on the Stage, we can not better describe than quote the observations of Babu Aparesh Chandra Mukherjee who was both an efficient manager and a successful dramatist of his time. Thus he wrote in *Rangaloye Treesh Batshar*—page 30—32 :

"The ever-bold Amarendra now broke the fetters of Star's discipline. People coming to see the performance of Alibaba or pieces of the like sighed a sigh of relief by freely remarking, whistling and uttering unseemly jokes. Amarendranath made theatre democratic—an amusement-hall for all classes. Theatre's Bureaucracy was shaken and school-discipline here was a thing of the past, Handbills too exhibited expressions of an exciting nature. Star's strictness and sobriety, thrift and reserve got a metamorphosis at Amar's hands. Attempts now began to be made to draw artists by holding out better prospects and those who used to get Rs. 50 or 60 a month, were now paid double or treble, and the system of bonuses was enlarged, placards and handbills too were improved. Great sensation began to prevail in this theatre and Amarendra attained the celebrity of a popular actor. The atmosphere he created has still not been removed."

We can not say whether good or bad came with this revolutionary step, but as to Mr. Dutt, whatever happened, only brought into lime-light. Stage too was ere-long brought to its normal condition. After all Mr. Amarendra Dutta was only a product of Girish's school and Girish loved him as his son. We shall see that Amarendra hereafter too sought Girish's help who came there as director and master and very soon increased the dignity of

this democratic Classic again by his *Pandava Gourava*, *Bhrānti* and *Moner Matan* and *Satnām*. Besides, Amarendranath was a gifted artist and there was scarcely one on the Bengali Stage so charitable and open-handed as Mr. Dutt. In spite of his freaks now and again, he had the highest regards for Girish and often used to pay him proper respects as a disciple and we shall see, how even at the fag end of the present century, the same Classic that was converted into a place of hilarity, now under the eyes of Girish again assumed an atmosphere of divine purity, in the 'pepformance of another Pouranik-religious drama *Pandava Gourava* from Girish's pen staged on Feb. 17, 1900.

The dramatist marvellously draws the characters of Bhima, Subhadra, Krishna and Konchuki. The last character is an incarnation of devotion or Bhakti. It is an elaboration of the Vidushaka of *Jana* ; while the latter has marvellous faith pure and simple, Konchuki's Bhakti proceeds from Jnan or knowledge and he points out the path how to attain unquestioning faith. One has Bhakti and gets Krishna, another shows the path for Krishna, to one if he has Bhakti. Konchuki appeared to be devotional ardour personified and the part used to be represented by Girish Chandra himself.

Bhima is the central figure in the play and

Indian Mirror (April 12, 1900) aptly remarks about this creation in the following way—

> "Bhima is utterly unlike the Bhima of tradition. He is not a Brobdingnargian proportion and does not make a reckless expenditure of lung-power. Calm yet firm, devoted to Krishna and yet dutiful towards Dandi who songht his protection, stands Bhima, the centre of interest and the admiration of friend and foe alike,"

Girish's Konchuki was superb as he was Bhakti pesrsonified and so was Amarendranath a great success in the role of Bhima. His fitting appearence, sonorous voice and impressive delivery elicited praise from all persons.

Subhadra was an improvement of the character of Jana—high-souled and helpful, calm and devotional, and the part was very ably acted by Tincowri, espicially as her appearance was quite in keeping with her representation.

The drama fetched large sums of money to the Classic and nay more—with Girish's presence and personality, the vulgar atmosphere disappeared day by day. As to the actual effects we would fittingly quote here the observations of Babu Upendranath Vidyabhusan, a biographer of Amarendranath—

> "As soon as Girish Chandra joined the Classic, it attained the reputation of being the best theatre in Calcutta. Every night the audience for even this religious drama was so large that many had to go back disappointed for want of seats."

Thus was the position of the Classic restored again under Girish's care and supervision—

The cast in *Pandava Gourava* was as follows.

Konchuki	—	Giris Chandra
Bhisma	—	Mohendra Lal Bose
Bhima	—	Amarendranath Dutt
Arjuna	—	Nilmoni Ghose
Kansa & Sātyaki	—	Ahindra
Ghesera	—	Nripendra Nath Bose
Judhistira	—	Natabar Choudhury
Srikrishna	—	Miss Promoda Sundari
Kunti	—	Gulphan Hari
Droupadi	—	Golap Sundari
Subhadra	—	Tincowrie
Uttarā	—	Thakomoni
Rukmini	—	Bhuson Kumari
Joyā	—	Ranimoni
Urbashi	—	Kusum Kumari

All the parts were well-rendered, and the play as a whole was a grand success. *Pandav Gourava* henceforth became so great an attraction, that amateur parties in villages and towns henceforth considered it a fit drama for staging and from hundreds of stages of Bengal from now Bhima's devotional sayings began to be repeated every night.

The old century passes and we just fall to the Twentyeth Century. It is high time for us now to stop here and we shall next trace the novelty and character of the present century-dramas in our next volume, which will immediately follow.

INDEX—(Persons)

e—indicates English, m—Marathi, g—Gujrati